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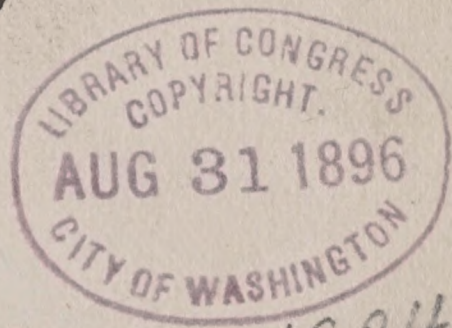
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A LONELY MAID

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By
m. J.
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"PETER'S WIFE," "A POINT OF CONSCIENCE," ETC.



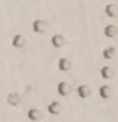
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A LONELY MAID.

CHAPTER I.

“As merry as the day is long.”

“So nice to find ourselves all here together once again!” says Mrs. Clarence, with a satisfied sigh, throwing her pretty head a little backwards and sideways,—her charmingly insincere face smiling out of its aureole of flaxen hair. She is popularly supposed, in her own set, to have the only pure flaxen hair in the United Kingdom; and, indeed, to give the Devil of gossip his due, no one has ever suggested the word dye!

In town—in the season—this delicate yellow hair of hers has created a small sensation for more years than she now cares to be reminded of, though in reality she is only thirty. For the rest, she has little to complain of in her life; her means being ample, her charms beyond reproach, and her very uncongenial husband at this moment at the Antipodes.

In this small country place—an insignificant spot in the south of Ireland—she is regarded by the villagers in the little town below with feelings that sway between awe and delight.

"'Tis a vision she is," said Mr. Twoomey, the opulent owner of the small hotel in Carrigmahon, when Mrs. Clarence had swept through the town in her cousin's—old Sir Lucien Adare's—carriage. "Wid her hair as yellow as the statchew in the chapel beyont. Faith, now that I think of it, she might be own cousin to the Blessed Virgin."

Mrs. Clarence and the Virgin Mary! When Sir Lucien by some chance heard of this strange combination, he chuckled to himself. It gave him food, indeed, for much cynical mirth; the joke lasting him (with *care*) for many days, and enabling him to add extra little stings to the remarks that fell from his sour old lips every now and then,—remarks already too full of bitterness to suit the palates of most.

His present guests take them nonchalantly enough. Custom stales most things, and they being his nearest, if not his dearest, are so far accustomed to them as to prove positively hardened. Sir Lucien, who, as a rule, detests this Irish home of his, took a freak into his head last month, and, after eight years' absence from it, decided on gathering together such of his kinsfolk as accompanied him on his last visit, and spending a month or two in the pleasant wilds of Carrigmahon.

Carrig Castle—The Castle, as it is called "for short" by the peasantry—is a sufficiently charming home to tempt most people, had they been its possessors, to visit it at least once a year. But not its delights have brought Sir Lucien to it in this sunny mid-August. Old associations have given him a distaste for Carrig that amounts to positive aversion, and

but for several important reasons, it is quite certain he would not have come here at all. A defaulting agent for one. A battery of letters from his county solicitor for another. The knowledge that Brian Deane was home again and staying at the old mill, for a third, and strongest of all. He had always believed that fellow knew something of the missing jewels!

* * * * *

“Yes. Isn’t it?” says a very pretty girl, answering Mrs. Clarence’s languid remark. There is very little languor about Mary Adare, or May, as she is generally called. “Hilary and I were delighted to come, weren’t we, Hilary?”

She leans towards her brother, a tall young man sitting in a lounging chair near one of the open windows, through which the moonlight is streaming so vividly as to almost put the many shaded lamps out of countenance.

“Immensely,” returns Captain Adare, politely, if indifferently. He is lazily pulling a little terrier’s ears, the dog answering these endearments by making snaps at his fingers. It is possible that Hilary, Mary’s brother and Sir Lucien’s heir, scarcely heard his sister’s question, his mind being at the moment many miles away,—in a conservatory at that last dance he went to before leaving town, before “being dragged down here,” as he termed it. Amongst the flowers on that last memorable evening, he had told himself that the girl whose fan he was then caressing was the prettiest creature in the world. A week after he still thought so; six weeks later—it is quite that now—

he is sitting here, trying to think so still, and failing a little. Six weeks is a long time when one is only twenty-eight.

"How many years since last we were here?" asks someone from the background, someone dangling gracefully over the sill of the window, and twanging gaily, with a remorseless disregard for time and tune, on a banjo.

"What a horrid question!" says Mrs. Clarence, with a delicate ruffling of her fair brows. "It *must* be Owen's!"

She peers round, softly parting with her fan the two men next her to make them stand aside until she can see the place where her brother, the Hon. Owen McGrath, sits revealed.

"Good old girl!" says the hero of the banjo. "You've guessed it. Go up one. Well, what's the matter with my question, anyway?"

He creates another discord on his abominable instrument with great effect. Everyone jumps! He is so charmed with this success that he instantly twangs again. This time everyone goes mad.

"Oh! do, *do* stop that dreadful noise," cries May, covering her little shell-pink ears with her hands.

"You know you love it," says Mr. McGrath, unmoved. He turns his head so far inwards that one can see that he is fat, fair, and twenty-four or so. His face is innocent of hair, and so, very nearly, is his head. His sister says he suggests a penitentiary, and that if he hasn't been in one, he ought to have been. However, both she and his father, Lord Kilfern, make much of him now and then, and so do a good many

far better people. "Come here and I'll sing to you! You won't? . . . You *shall*!" He has seized her frock and pulled her down beside him. There is a cousinship between them, as indeed there is between everyone now staying in Sir Lucien's house.

"Owen, don't be stupid!" May gives him a vigorous little push; but Mr. McGrath, with his arm so far thrust through hers as to enable him to get a purchase on the banjo, is already uplifting his terrible voice to the moonlit skies.

"And the owl looked up to the stars above
And sang to his light guitar,
Oh! Pussy my darling, oh! Pussy my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are, you are,
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

A young man had come rather quickly up to the window when Miss Adare had been brought so swiftly to a seat beside the interpreter of the banjo.

"Oh, is that you, Gilbert?" exclaims she. "Yes, help me up. I must say, Owen," turning wrathfully to her late companion, "if you think *that* music. . . ."

"Won't you wait for the next verse? Do," says Mr. McGrath. "It's teeming with interest. . . . It is a proposal . . . *from* you to me. . . . You won't wait? . . . Good heavens, how blind people are to their own interests nowadays! I might—impossible as it sounds—actually have said 'Yes.' . . ."

No one is listening to him, no one ever does, as a rule,—which says much for the wisdom of his acquaintances and friends.

But if the present company think to disconcert him by this disregard of his remarks, they are, indeed, mistaken. He rises like the Phoenix from its ashes to even fresher life, and the knowledge (which covers him with mirth) that Gilbert Grey is now at the other side of the room, getting as near to an open quarrel with May as he *dares*. Indeed, so far does the fight go that now May, leaving Gilbert Grey and treading the floor as she comes with the dainty air of a Titania insulted, drops into a seat next Eustace Everard, who, as one has come to know, is always very close to Mrs. Clarence.

He is a man of about forty, with blue eyes (paling now) and a pensive expression. He gives immensely to charities,—especially to orphanages,—is a sound Radical, and has about the worst reputation in Europe. His pensive expression, however, stands to him, and then he is so good to the little fatherless ones! A man who considers the orphans *must* be good! And, besides, he is so very rich!

“For me, I am delighted to be here again,” May is murmuring to him with the exaggerated delight of a girl who doesn’t mean a word she is saying. “I told you so a moment ago, didn’t I, Dolly?”—to Mrs. Clarence May always appeals. “I was awfully bored last season.” She says this a little more clearly, so that Gilbert Grey may hear. He had been particularly attentive to her last season . . . and she, if she told the truth, had been very attentive to him. . . . Mrs. Clarence regards her with a pitying stare.

“My *dear* May!”

"Oh, yes, I know," frowning and tilting an angry shoulder. "You need not look at me like that. I hate town! I love country! There it is," petulantly, "in the palm of your hand, however unfashionable you may think me."

"You mean?" asks Mrs. Clarence.

"Oh!" impatiently, "I don't know what I mean. Except that the cool, green country has charms for me."

"So it has for the beetle," says Mrs. Clarence, sadly.

"So it has for me," says Everard in his slow way, getting a glance of gratitude from May in return. Then he turns to Mrs. Clarence again. "You might have made it a robin," he reminds her, with a smile and in a low tone.

She glances up at him; a mere touch that lets him see the velvety violet of her beautiful eyes.

"I could have made it prettier, certainly. But now that you have joined factions with her, I am glad I didn't, anyway," with a lingering half-come half-go glance. "I don't think the robin simile would *suit* you like a robin."

At this Mr. Everard laughs a little, and, after a little, too, withdraws to the safe solitude of the veranda and the delights of a solitary cigar.

"Last time I was here," says Mr. McGrath, suddenly, and apropos of nothing, "there was a donkey. A most energetic ass. I used to ride him bare-backed, with his disgustingly short mane as reins."

"In what circus were you then?" asks Captain Adare, anxiously. But McGrath continues his speech unmoved. "I wonder if he is here still?"

"Ask Sir Lucien," says May.

"Not much. My dear girl, do you know me? No, I shall find him out for myself. I remember he had a little black cross of hair over his shoulders."

"Every donkey has that," says Grey, contemptuously.

McGrath grows thoughtful. "Has *he*?" he asks May, in a low tone, indicating Grey; but May, who, as a rule, aids and abets him in all his villainies, now makes a little swift move and turns her back upon him.

"Well, girls *are* queer things," says Owen, reflectively, to himself. And then, catching her sleeve,—sleeves are big nowadays,—he draws her back.

"What's up?"

"Nothing! What should there be?" Her eyes belie her words.

"Come and see that old moke again, then, tomorrow after breakfast."

"Nonsense! He must be dead by this time."

"Donkeys never die," solemnly.

"Don't be absurd."

"They don't really. It has been proved."

"Everything dies."

"Except donkeys," sturdily. "They are superior to us, you see. You will come after breakfast."

"Certainly not," coldly. And then, as if recognizing that her incivility to Owen may be pleasing to Gilbert, she suddenly changes her air. "A bike is good enough for me," declares she, with a little laugh.

"But so antediluvian, dearest," puts in Mrs. Clar-

ence, who had been the centre of admiration at Battersea Park some weeks ago. Taken the cake, according to her brother. "Everyone can bike nowadays. It is disgusting how the middle classes pick up things! Really the good old donkey has its charms. One could strike out a new line on him."

"So you could," says Owen, encouragingly. "Over his head!"

Miss Adare laughs; but Mrs. Clarence, though refusing to smile at the absurd joke, answers it.

"Not as we shall ride him *now*," says she, calmly. Visions of rational costumes rise to every one.

"Where's Uncle Lucien?" asks May, suddenly.

"He has gone to bed; said he did not feel very well!"

"What a blessing!" says Mrs. Clarence. Whether this has allusion to Sir Lucien's being safely out of reach or ill is left doubtful.

"He is like a dear innocent little child," says Everard. "We never love him so dearly as when he is asleep."

"I don't believe he is ever asleep," says Mr. McGrath, gloomily. "And if by chance he ever *should* be, I know he'd walk."

"You mistake," says Hilary, talking two notes deeper. "He is reserving that as a *bon bouche* for us when he is dead!"

"Pouf!" says Mrs. Clarence; "do you think he is going to give us the satisfaction of leaving the world before us? You little know him!"

"Anyhow, it seems we are safe for an hour or so," says Everard, dropping into the chair nearest to her.

"Let us make the most of it. By the way, what is the matter with him, Hilary?"

"I don't know really. But I made out he went for a long walk, and came back tired; he looked wretched, I thought."

"Yet he ought to be happy," says his sister. "He has every one of his relations round him!"

At this they all roar, to May's intense disgust.

"The flowers of speech are still with us," says Everard, sweetly.

"And such a little daisy of a flower," says Owen. "May, I always knew you were an angel. I'm *your* relation, remember. I am round *you*, so you must be happy!"

"I do hate stupid people," says May, pettishly, whereon the cloud that has been adorning Gilbert Grey's forehead for the past twenty minutes lifts considerably.

"For the matter of that," says Mrs. Clarence, "Sir Lucien has not got all his relations round him. There is yet another niece of his living in this part of the country. Have you all forgotten her? But it is not to be wondered at, as of *her* he never speaks."

CHAPTER II.

“What hap dismays the dead? Their couch is low;
And over it the summer grasses creep,
Or the winter snows enshroud it, white and deep,
Or long prevailing winds of autumn blow.”

THERE is a pause. Everyone looks as if in search of something once known, but forgotten for years and years. Hilary alone smiles.

“Oh! yes, he does sometimes—with adjectives!” says Captain Adare. The little terrier has now gone to sleep upon his knees.

“I declare I *had* forgotten all about her,” cries May, growing suddenly excited. “But now I remember she is our cousin,—our first cousin, isn’t she, Hilary? Her mother was our aunt,—Uncle Lucien’s sister? Yet imagine,” spreading her pretty hands abroad for a mere charming second. “We have none of us ever yet seen her. Have you, Hilary? No? Then where was she when last we were all here?”

“Where *you* ought to have been,—in the school-room,” returns her brother, laughing.

“You are wrong,” says Mrs. Clarence. “She was in Paris with that precious mother of hers.”

“Is she there still?” asks Everard.

"Oh, no! she is here now, as I tell you. Has been here, indeed, for some time; ever since her mother's death, which took place about six years ago. She is living in an old house seven miles from this, with some relations of her father called Deane.

"*Fancy that,*" says Mary (though she has never read a word of Ibsen). "Isn't it ridiculous that one can't see her? One's own cousin, and only seven miles away!"

"In a great old rambling house," goes on Hilary, taking up Dolly Clarence's revelations. He has not as yet, however, seen the house of the unknown cousin. "A regular barrack of a place, I'm told; huge, empty, and with a dilapidated mill at the end of the lawn or somewhere."

"Her father used to work it," says Gilbert Grey; "at least so I'm told."

"Her grandfather!" corrects Mrs. Clarence. "Thank heaven, they are neither of them alive now. I suppose in a way *they* would be relations—of a sort—too."

"A miller," puts in May, a little disdainfully.

"Well, yes and no," says her brother. "If you allude to her father, hardly *that*, in the usual acceptation of the term, as I believe, though he still made pretence of working the mill, he let it go to irretrievable ruin. He was a decent enough sort of fellow, I have heard,—connected not so badly either on his mother's side, but not quite,—*you* know!" with a comprehensive nod all round. "A bookworm, too, which is fatal if one is not—exactly—*you* see!"

"Pity Sir Lucien won't recognize her," says

Gilbert Grey, who has a good heart if a very jealous one.

"Pity he *should* recognize her now," puts in Captain Adare, with a shrug. "It would be a *bêtise* of the first water. If he had recognized her long ago, something might have been made of her; but now—she must be a child of the soil, indeed."

"A little touch of injustice somewhere," suggests Everard, with a pensive expression. It brings a smile to the lips of Mrs. Clarence. She knows him. When had *he* ever done justice to anyone?

"Well, I agree with Hilary," says May, in her little rushy way. "An impossible, vulgar, countrified girl by this time! *How* is she to be accepted? Oh!"—impatiently—"how *could* Uncle Lucien's sister have married so dreadfully?"

"I've just been telling you it wasn't so bad as all that," says her brother. "He was a miller certainly, so was his father and grandfather and great-grandfather, I believe, before him; and really nowadays if one can show up three generations one ought to get the Victoria Cross. What the girl is like is the question. Run wild, I shouldn't wonder. The old mill is standing still, I hear."

"*Very* still," says Everard, with a laugh. "It was in the last stage of decay when we were here,—*how* many years ago?" turning to Mrs. Clarence, who gives him a glance in return that makes him laugh inwardly. "Well, when we were here *yesterday*!"

"But what has all this got to do with our mysterious cousin?" asks Mr. McGrath, who has been weaving all the silken things in the room into a sort

of lasso, with which to embarrass May presently, and drag her into his net, to the sure discomfiture of Gilbert Grey. "Let us come back to her; I hate ruins. Some tom-fools admire them—to me they suggest nothing but old women."

"You haven't been listening," says Mrs. Clarence, severely. "Of course Sir Lucien was frantic when his sister made so low a match, and now he visits on the girl that ancient feud."

"Just like him," declares Grey, indignantly. "Fancy making the life of a young girl wretched just because her people had not done according to *his* tenets!"

"There was more," says Mrs. Clarence. "Haven't you heard, Gilbert, about the disappearance of those jewels?" She leans forward; jewels appeal to her. "Surely you must have heard!"

"I have not, indeed. Jewels! Whose?"

"What? Jewels? I never heard of them either," cries May, growing suddenly most deeply interested. "Did *you* ever hear about them, Hilary?"

"Years ago. But I confess I had forgotten all about them until lately, when there seemed to be a chance of the revival of the sensation that marked their disappearance."

"But I never heard of their appearance," protests May.

"You must have been asleep, my good child," says Dolly.

"Not a bit more than Gilbert," a little indignantly. She resents this speech. "*You* never heard of them either, Gilbert, did you?"

"Never!" says Grey, emphatically. Blessed igno-

rance that seems to bring them even a degree nearer to each other!

"Well, tell us about them." May is somewhat mollified.

"Oh! It's a long story." Mrs. Clarence looks bored.

"I'll tell you," says Everard, who seems amused. "Your dear Uncle Lucien's sister—an only sister—was by a clause in her father's will entitled on her marriage to take possession of the family jewels. I have heard it said that they were unique,—that their price was fabulous; but, at all events, there is no doubt about it that they were and are (though I expect distributed by this time) some of the best stones in Europe. Of course, the old man always thought that with her beauty and position she would marry brilliantly, and so left her the jewels. She, however, elected to marry the miller, O'Connell."

"She ought to have been ashamed of herself," yawns Mrs. Clarence.

"But what an extraordinary arrangement,—about the will, I mean!" says Grey.

"The absurdest on record. There was, however, a proviso. She was to have the jewels for her life, *or* until she had a son. There was no mention of a daughter, or else our unknown cousin would be the richest heiress in England to-day. Failing the son, they were to revert to the family again,—to Sir Lucien, in fact. He did all he could to make his father change this will; but even after the disastrous marriage the old man would not. She was to have the jewels for her life, or for her son."

"Yes, that was it," says Mrs. Clarence. "I remember it all now quite clearly. And no son was born. Only a girl. Therefore the diamonds—*very* valuable,—half a king's ransom, as they say—should have come to Sir Lucien. But *how* was it, Eustace?" to Everard. "On her death"—frowning prettily (she never forgets appearances) and shaking a small forefinger up and down, as if to help her memory—"the jewels were not to be had; they were lost; gone, and never a single sign of them since; isn't that it?"

"A very graphic description. On Mrs. O'Connell's death, demand was made for the jewels, but from that day to this no tidings of them have ever been heard."

"Her husband?"

"O'Connell, they all *said*, made away with them. But——"

"You think?"

"From all *I* have heard of her," puts in Mrs. Clarence, indolently, "I should say Lilian Adare—Mrs. O'Connell—had more to do with the selling of or disposing of them than anyone else. Aunt Maria, who knew her very intimately, says she was a vain, intolerably selfish creature, with a capacity for spending money that——"

"Even *you* could not rival," says Everard, in a little, low, teasing whisper that reaches her ear alone.

"Still, a woman, however extravagantly inclined, could hardly sell a quantity of valuable stones without a chance of their being traced," says Gilbert Grey.

"That's what I always think," says Adare. "And O'Connell, out of sheer malignity (you know he was never acknowledged by any of your family), could not *he* perhaps——?" He pauses; it is bad to speak ill of the dead.

"You think he *hid* them?" Mrs. Clarence stifles another yawn behind her fan. "Perhaps that is the best solution of the mystery. At all events, it gives me hope of a final sensation! *The discovery!!* In large type."

"What madness to make a will like that!" says Everard. "To give stones of almost untold value into the hands of a girl who was unable to manage even her own life. I don't exactly hanker after Sir Lucien, but I'm sorry he failed in getting his father to change his will. But it seems the old man would not hear of it. He stood firm. The fact is, he was not in love with Sir Lucien, and he adored his daughter,—perhaps because she was his only one."

"Oh, no! Because she was domineering,—hard, unloving, but very beautiful," says Mrs. Clarence, with a cynical shrug of her shoulders.

"There might have been another reason for the old man's obstinacy," says Gilbert Grey. "Everard has hinted at it. We all know he hated his eldest son, Sir Lucien. Have you forgotten it?"

"Hardly forgotten," Mr. McGrath, who has been so taken up with knotting his noose as to be unable to bear the noble part he usually does in every conversation, whether it concerns him or otherwise, now breaks in, solemnly. "We merely felt it was unnecessary to mention it. Our dear relative, Sir

Lucien, has made known to us by this time his many engaging qualities. You say he went for a long walk to-day with Hilary in the direction of the old mill?"

"Yes," May nods her head, "that is where his sister Mrs. O'Connell used to live."

"Where *our aunt* used to live," corrects her brother, lifting his brows and smiling a little.

"Oh!" May frowns slightly, "I never thought of her as that."

"Yet you thought of her daughter as your cousin."

"That's so different."

"Is it? Yet it was her mother who married the millman——"

"Your uncle," puts in Everard, carefully.

"It's absurd," says May, throwing up her head with a touch of *hauteur*; "because one's aunt happens to marry a—a—anybody, why should 'anyone' be called my uncle?"

"So unfair," murmurs Mrs. Clarence. "So unjust. These stupid governments that come and go are always bringing in the silliest laws for the silliest things in the world, when sensible ones are for ever staring them in the face. Now a bill that would make an aunt not an aunt when she had married beneath her would do more good than all this education rubbish you could put your mind to."

"I entirely agree with you," says Everard, who is a cousin of Sir Lucien's only, and who has come down here into this little Irish corner of the world for no earthly reason he can assign to himself, unless

he believes in the shooting, and the idea that it may be good for him to vegetate a bit. The fact that Mrs. Clarence was also coming had influenced him slightly,—not much. He has known her for so many years. “By the way, Sir Lucien’s sister, Lilian Adare, ran away with her husband, didn’t she?”

“Oh, no! She only married him, to the disgust of all her family. Her father—your grandfather, May—lived here then, and as she was the light of his eyes, he forgave her, though her brother, Sir Lucien, never did. But her father’s forgiveness (he must have been in his dotage) did her little good, as he died three days after her wedding. Your poor father, you know, died two years before that.”

“Yes, I know,” says May, slowly. She hardly remembers either her father or her mother. Her father had been Sir Lucien’s younger brother.

“It was quite a tragedy,” murmurs Mrs. Clarence, in a tone that would have suited quite as admirably if she had said, “It was quite a comedy.”

“How she must have felt that!” says May, in a low tone. “Her father dying so soon after her terrible defiance of all his wishes, his desires. . . .”

“Oh, she was a fool!” says Mrs. Clarence. “And fools feel nothing.”

Everard regards her curiously.

“You don’t study things,” says he. “The one who *does* feel is the fool!”

At this Mr. McGrath grows thoughtful.

“Sir Lucien must be a genius,” he remarks.

“You are wrong there. He feels something,”

says Gilbert Grey, who always contradicts Owen if possible, and, as a rule, to his subsequent grief. "He feels the loss of those stones."

"I think he has come here this time because of them," says Everard. "You know that fellow Deane is in the country. He was a nephew of O'Connell's, and after O'Connell's death Sir Lucien took it into his head that Deane knew something of the jewels."

"He thought——"

"He never thinks. He feels certain that they are still intact, hidden somewhere, and that probably Deane as the sole relative of O'Connell may know something of them."

"Why not the girl rather?"

"Well, he is divided between suspicion of her and Deane. That's why he hates her."

"What fun it would be to make him receive her and acknowledge her whilst we are here!" says Mrs. Clarence, her eyes brightening.

"Oh, no!" May grows a little uncertain. "I dare say, I am *sure* she is dreadful. Quite a common girl,—an impossible person."

"That's where the fun would come in," declares Mrs. Clarence, languidly. "To catch a wild creature like that and try to tame her,—and with Sir Lucien looking on!" She laughs in her low, soft, somewhat wicked little way.

"Oh, if it came to that! To catch anything and try to do it good," says May. "There would be some excitement about *that*. I should quite like it."

"I knew it! I guessed it! We both think alike!" cries Mr. McGrath, enthusiastically. And in a second she finds *herself* caught by soft silken thongs and bound to her seat. Owen has thrown the lasso.

"Owen! How detestable you can be!" from May, angrily, and "Really, McGrath, this is going a little too far," from the irate Grey, is enough to repay Mr. McGrath for all the knottings together of those silken chair-backs (and twisted ropes of silk from May's work-basket and sundry rolls of ribbon caught round flower-pots), and to make him at peace with himself and everyone else for the rest of the evening. He has scored one off Grey.

CHAPTER III.

“When youth and beauty meet together
There’s work for breath.”

ON this old mill, once fine in its strength and its proportions, now dilapidated and grown grey and wrecked through stress of age and neglect, the August sun is smiling (as, thank God! it always does smile on the good and bad alike), lighting up its moss-grown corners, its falling chimneys, and its crumbling walls, that would have crumbled even faster but for the faithful ivy, friend of many years, that still clings to it.

Over there, a little farther up the hill, and half hidden by a belt of trees that had been planted between it and the mill (perhaps with a view to hiding the latter), the house may be seen,—“O’Connell’s House,” as it is called by the peasants round. A very ordinary old house, square and bare and exposed to all the winds of heaven, with sad touches on it here and there, made by time and want of care, and redeemed only entirely from the basest commonplace by a splendid old mullioned window on the north side and the massive oak wood of the doorway. A forbidding-looking house, with the remains of an old moat running round it, that once, perhaps,

was full of water, but now is dry and overgrown with rank grass and poisonous weeds. No doubt, in the past generation the river that flooded it had been turned into another channel to feed the old mill below, that now in its turn is dry and silent too.

* * * * *

The sun to-day is shining too hotly for the comfort of one person, at all events. Captain Adare, who has been out fishing since early dawn, has now, as it draws towards evening, reached the small river, the Arrigaun, that, beginning quite a long way up between the shoulders of the two big hills, runs down here straight into the arms of the old mill.

Sport has been bad,—so bad that even a fisherman (most patient of all creatures on this earth of ours) must be given leave to swear at it. Hilary has not sworn as yet, but at this point, finding the river grown so shallow and so choked with weeds that the throwing of a fly can but be for the merriment of the fishes, comes to a standstill, and takes commune with himself as to which is the shortest way home. *This* way?—he looks to the road behind him,—but it gives him no clue. He had come, following the river whithersoever it chose to lead him, not thinking of roads, or a way to return, and it had led him so pretty a dance, that now the road stretching out like a white ribbon to—*anywhere* (so long it is)—conveys to him no meaning as to how to get back to Carrig in time for dinner.

Where the deuce has he got to? He looks to right and left, but no one comes in sight, and there is not a rising cloud of smoke upon the air to tell

of a peasant's cottage. Once again he turns his glance on the old mill, that had appeared so hopeless a derelict to him at his first glance that he had given it up as a means of communication with his fellow-creatures. Who could live there in that old wind-ridden barrack of a place, windowless, almost roofless, a mere splendid ruin uprearing its damaged head to the skies—that never care?

His eyes sweep it carelessly, as if knowing nothing is to be got from it, and then all at once grow concentrated on one spot,—one opening where a window in the past no doubt had been. Surely there, in the frameway of it, someone can be seen. He can hardly be sure, as the sun, so brilliant half an hour ago, has now capriciously retired, giving way to a soft, pale grey mist that, rising, rapidly envelops most things in its delicate folds.

Piercing the mist for a moment, the sun shines out again, making the figure more prominent,—tall, slender, girlish.

“The Maid of the Mist,” he tells himself with a smile. “Well, anyway, I suppose she can send me on my way with or without her blessing.”

He wades through the river, now so shallow as to be hardly dignified by that name any longer, and taking a fence, pulls up presently right under the old mill. He has got beyond the range of the window where the figure stood, and the old gaunt frame-work of the place becomes a blank to him.

“Still, she *was* there,” he says to himself, and going farther on, and rounding a corner or two, finds himself in front of a huge opening in the wall ; it was

once a doorway, no doubt, but is now only a yawning orifice; and of these doorways he can see that there are several farther on, but he stays at the first he comes to, and entering it, runs up a bare, tottering staircase that is clinging, as it were, to the wall on his right.

Before going up this rotten treadway he had noticed distinctly, yet with indifference at the time, the mark of an arrow,—a small black arrow painted on the side of the wall by which he had come in,—an arrow pointing downwards.

Now he has come to the top of the stairway, and, bowing his head beneath an arch that has been built very low, finds himself upon a floor that once had had many a bushel of grain upon it, but is now broken and rotten, a mere trap for unwary feet, and empty—save for——

* * * * *

She stands up as he comes in.

Once again the heavens, as though in recognition of her beauty, open wide, and the sun, shining through their clefts, falls full upon her. She had turned at his approach and is now looking at him; it is a calm, dignified look, that has no fear in it and no ill-bred confusion. The floor between them might indeed be regarded as a protection,—had she even dreamed of wanting so absurd a thing,—being so broken and divided here and there that the terrible depths below can be distinctly seen. But in the embrasures of the window of this torn-down old mill the flooring still holds firm; and erect, beautiful, expectant, she stands, her eyes on his, her head

a little forward bent, a book, half-closed, lying between the fingers of the hand that has now, in her surprise, been lowered to her side.

"I beg your pardon," says Adare, greatly taken aback at this sudden coming on a gently born girl, where he had expected to find only a young woman of the farming class, who would have set him on his right road to Carrig Castle; "but the fact is, I've lost my way, and I couldn't see a living soul in sight to make enquiries of until"—with an apologetic smile and a slight bow—"I caught sight of you in the window."

"Yes?" She too smiles faintly, and as her lips part he acknowledges yet more deeply the charm, the loveliness, of her perfect face. "You," with a glance at his fishing boots, "saw me from the river?"

"From down there," pointing through the bare open space where a window once had been to a turn in the stream below. "Of course"—hesitating—"I cannot be sure it was you I saw——"

"Oh, yes." She nods her head, gravely. "I am the only one who ever enters this old ruin."

"I feel I've been awfully presumptuous," says Adare, "coming here disturbing you. But will you be so good as to tell me"—he pauses and laughs involuntarily; his laugh is charming—"where I am?"

"You are in the townland of Beanreagh, and this is the old mill. O'Connell's mill they call it."

Adare starts slightly. "Why, that is where——"
"O'Connell's mill?" repeats he, slowly.

"You have heard of it, then? It"—simply—"belonged to my father. Our house is up there." Her eyes go over his shoulder, and one slender hand points to where, as he turns round, he can see, through a broken window, a big, gaunt, white house, dull and unattractive.

"Your house? You are then," regarding her closely,—*"Your name is—O'Connell?"*

"I am Amber O'Connell," returns she, gently, yet with growing amazement.

"And I"—quickly—"am Hilary Adare."

"Adare?" She lifts her brows. The name, so far as he is concerned, evidently conveys nothing to her.

"Surely"—a little hotly—"you have heard of us!"

"I am sorry. But," colouring slightly, as if ashamed of an ignorance that seems to hurt him, "I really have not. Of course I know the name. There is even some one—an old man—Sir Lucien Adare—who, I believe, used to live in this part of the world at one time, but he has been in England for years, and——"

"He is not in England now; he is here."

"Here!" All at once her face changes. Her lip curls. Instinctively she draws herself up, and a very passion of anger and defiance blazes in her dark blue eyes. "At Carrig!" She draws her breath sharply. "And *you*?" demands she, imperiously.

"I am Sir Lucien's nephew, and—I *think*—your cousin!"

There is a long pause, whilst two frowning blue

eyes gaze into two dark brown eyes that are full of entreaty. Then—

“Come, I can’t help being his nephew, can I?” says Adare. With this he frankly holds out his hand to her. But she puts hers behind her back.

“*His* nephew!”

“But *your* cousin!”

She sighs quickly, and then—as if the generous nature of her rebels against the thought of anger against a man who, however closely connected with the enemy, still has done her no wrong of his own accord—draws one small brown hand from behind her and lays it daintily in his broad palm; with a certain reservation and a touch of *hauteur*, however, that sits most charmingly upon her.

He takes it, holding it gently, whilst he looks at her; then lets it go again. If for a moment he had imagined—which, after all, perhaps he didn’t—that *he* was the cousin best fitted by circumstances to confer distinction on the other, in this scene of recognition, he must now for ever be aware of his mistake. This slight, unknown creature has given him to understand, by a glance, a gesture, a turn of her haughty little head, that she permits him to be on an equality with her because he is *her* cousin, not because she is *his*!

“Yes, we are cousins,” she admits, in a very low voice, so that he feels not only thrust back, but almost discarded.

“Don’t say you are sorry about it.”

“Not about *that*! No, I am only sorry that we have ever met!”

He glances at her.

"You don't *look* discourteous," he ventures, in a reproachful way.

"Yet to you I am, I *must* be," cries she, vehemently. "Do you think I have not felt—have not suffered . . . from your indifference to me?"

"Mine! *My* indifference! . . ."

"Oh! it is all the same." She turns away from him, looking out through the window to the river beyond, and yet in such a way that he knows she cannot see the river, because her eyes are filled so full with tears that she fears the overflowing of them.

"*You* are on his side, *I* am on this."

"I am not on Sir Lucien's side, if you mean that."

"You must be. It is useless to talk about it. There!" She glances kindly at him, kindly but distantly. "Let us make an end of it. We have met to-day—To-morrow——"

"We shall"—eagerly—"meet again."

"Oh, no. We shall probably forget that we have ever met."

"*I shall not*," with decision. "Where are you going now?" She has made a step towards the stone staircase outside.

"Home." Her manner is cold almost to disagreeability. Perhaps she feels the little touch of discourtesy, because she turns to him, with her foot on the topmost stair, and says,—

"You want to know the shortest way to Carrig, do you not? Come with me and I shall point it out to you."

* * * * *

He follows her. She goes very silently ; and silence thus being imposed upon him, he has time to glance round him ; but nothing on his way down these dangerous old stairs attracts his attention until, on coming once again to the doorway, his eyes light on the small arrow, painted black upon the wall, that had first caught his eye on coming in. A little farther on and this anon can be seen, and on the left of the doorway he sees one again ; both these arrows point downwards.

CHAPTER IV.

“O rose so subtly sweet!

What dost thou in the snow
The time of frost and sleet,
When roses should not blow,
Playing at summer so?”

“WHAT a wonderful old place!” says he, stopping and peering down through a great hole in the flooring near the doorway. A trap-door once had covered it, no doubt, because some of the broken fastenings can still be seen, whilst a ladder caught on by iron crooks (that looked comparatively new, considering the other surroundings) hangs over the gaping space. “Does it ever come to an end?”

“I don’t know; I suppose so, down *there*.” She has come up quite close to him and is now bending, as he is, over the yawning gulf in the rotten boards, and gazing into seemingly unfathomable depths below. “Do you know,” she goes on, “this old mill has the strangest fascination for me. I cannot keep away from it. I think”—smiling—“it will make me or mar me some day. Black as it looks down there, another floor is beneath it, and beyond that something else lies,—I don’t know what.”

“A cellar, probably.”

"I daresay. As I tell you, I don't know. I have not had the courage to go down. There is a sound of water when you get to the flooring below, and that means rats! I hate rats. I'm a coward, I confess it."

They are standing together, peering into the black void beneath, but now she turns and gives him a little glance. It is the archest, merriest little glance,—the most innocent one,—and she accompanies it with a laugh, soft and light-hearted.

He turns his gaze from that queer gulf beneath to meet this laugh, and, meeting it, is conscious of a supreme surprise. To look, to laugh like that, when only a moment ago she seemed so cold, so self-attained, so unobtainable. The extraordinary change in her gives him the sudden feeling that until now he has not *really* met her. What infinite variety lies in her face, her whole air! He loses himself for a moment in the question as to whether she is most charming, grave, as she was when first he met her, or gay, as she is now. At all events, beyond doubt, she is the prettiest girl he has——

His thoughts stop abruptly, and something like confusion, that fast changes to disgust, comes into his eyes. Good heavens! How could he ever have thought—imagined—that that *other* girl was . . .

"I believe *you* are afraid of rats, too," says a mischievous voice that rouses him from his displeasing memories.

"Why?" asks he, starting.

"Your face"—laughing—"has changed so much."

"Well,"—he has recovered himself now and laughs with her,—“I don't specially love them.”

“That settles it,” with an indescribable gesture, so quick, so sweet it is, so taunting. “I sha'n't show you that part of my estate to-day.”

“I don't believe you could show it,” with fine contempt. “I don't believe you know your way to it. You have confessed to me that you were never there.”

“For all that,” glancing at him from under her long lashes, “if you had been brave enough, I might have even now found cause to explore my kingdom underground. But as it is——”

She shrugs her shoulders. The gesture is a little French, but not aggressively so, and he remembers all at once that she had lived with her mother in Paris when a child. Such little tricks cling. And yet it is hardly foreign, that pretty shrug. It seems to belong to her alone.

She is smiling at him, defying him.

“If it comes to that,” says he, bracing himself as if for a struggle, “I shall do it. I feel particularly brave just now. Come, before my courage evaporates.”

He has one foot on the ladder.

“No, no.” She makes a little protesting gesture, and, turning, brings him after her out into the misty sweetness of the evening.

“You spoke of home a while ago,” says he, presently. “It is that house up there, is it not? But a house does not mean a home, and you have told me nothing of yourself. You have friends?”

"I have"—slowly—"relations." And then with a cold little smile, "You had not even learned *so* much about me?"

"I am so seldom here," begins Adare, flushing hotly. Then, losing all his self-control, "I know you have been most, most damn—— I mean, most disgracefully treated by the lot of us. But for the most part we never knew."

"And did not care to inquire." Her tone is no longer aggressive. It is low, and a little sigh breaks from her lips. "Well, you shall know all there is to know. I live here with a cousin of my father's, Esther Deane. She has some little money, and I have a little more, and so she says it is well for us both to keep house together."

"Yours being the house?"

"Oh, yes! If"—turning her head away from him—"such a torn-down old ruin can be called one."

She seems crushed for the moment, but almost in the moment recovers herself. Adare, who has not known the Irish character sufficiently well to make allowances for these sudden inexplicable changes of mood, is a little taken aback, when she says, calmly,—

"Talking of that, I must seem very inhospitable. That is my house up there, and yet—won't you come in and have a cup of tea? Esther, I am sure, will be——"

"Not to-day, thank you. I am afraid as it is I shall be a little late for dinner. But another day, if you will allow me——"

He breaks off, expecting an answer. But she is silent. Her whole air up to this has been so gracious

and so sweet that he turns sharply to look at her. Her eyes are steadily downcast, a faint tinge of colour that seems to him born of confusion warms her cheek. To cover it he goes on quickly,—

“You have another relation here, have you not?”

She glances at him quickly, a little disdainfully, perhaps. And Adare grows less sure that that touch of colour a moment since *was* born of confusion.

“You know something about me after all, then,” says she. “Yes, Esther’s brother, Brian Deane, is staying here, for the present only.”—Had that quick flush meant that he was out now, but might be in another day?—“He came from Australia about a month ago, where he has a sheep farm. Why he came, or for what, I don’t know, but Esther says on business. I know she wrote to him to come.”

“On business?”

“So she says. I sometimes think she wants to go back with him. And they both want me to go too. However,” with sudden recollection, “these details cannot possibly interest you. And—you want to know your road home, do you not?”

“I suppose so. I”—with a short laugh—“had almost forgotten about it.”

“At that rate”—coldly—“it is well I reminded you. You see that hill over there?”

“To the right?”

“Yes. You go up that, and then in the valley below it you will see a straight white road. Follow it and it will take you straight to Carrig.” She bows her head slightly. “Good-bye!”

"For the present,"—hastily. "And—you aren't going without shaking hands with me?"

She holds out a small and very unwilling hand, which she almost immediately reclaims.

"We are not living so very far apart," says he, hopefully; "we shall certainly meet again."

"I don't think so. I"—distinctly and with a clear gaze into his eyes—"hope not."

"*Hope* it?"

"With"—warmly—"all my heart. Don't think me too rude; but, believe me, it will be better that our acquaintance—such as it is—shall be ended now. There could *never* be friendship between our houses."

"There might be," begins he, impulsively ("if Sir Lucien once saw you," he was going to say, but luckily stops himself in time), "if you and Sir Lucien were to meet."

The girl makes a gesture full of extreme *hauteur*.

"I have no desire to meet Sir Lucien," says she, in a low voice full of concentrated bitterness.

"For all that——"

"Oh, *no!*" interrupting him vehemently. "Don't go on. Every word is an insult. Oh!" as if smitten with a smart twinge of pain, "I don't know *how* I have let myself be so friendly even with *you!*"

"*So* friendly! A very poor friendliness, indeed, considering we are cousins."

"A most mistaken friendliness"—hotly—"when I consider that your uncle will not so much as acknowledge my existence!"

"He's an old fool!" says Adare, lightly. "Wait

till you meet May—that's my sister, you know—and she'll tell you all about him. And, anyway, what has he got to do with you and me—or"—hastily—"anyone, for the matter of that? It's a mere mistake on his part,—he's always making them,—a misconception,—a——"

She puts up her hand and checks him.

"You forget I know it all. Sir Lucien never forgave my mother for marrying my father, and he is far less likely to forgive me, who am my father's daughter."

"Oh, what nonsense! Why, look here——" He feels full of eloquence, but again she stops him by a slight but imperious gesture.

"It is *not* nonsense. He believes my father stole and sold those jewels that my mother was given by—— Oh!"—passionately—"of course, you too know the whole of that detestable, hideous slander." Her eyes are aflame. "If you had *known* my father——"

"I believe the whole story a most despicable lie." His tone is almost as vehement as her own. "But——"

"There are *no* 'buts.'" She is now in as handsome a rage as any pretty girl may choose to be in, and once again, even in this moment, so distracting and perplexing, it occurs to Hilary that at this moment he is seeing her for the *first* time; that all his other knowledge of her—immense, as he had fondly believed, though gathered within an hour—sinks into insignificance. How inexplicable she is! How uncertain!—how—— She does not give him time to follow out this last reflection.

"How does that old man *dare* to say my father was a thief? Oh, yes he did! He met Brian the other day and accused him of knowing what my father had done with them. My father! As if he would *touch* them! My mother had them—I know that. I often saw them. The necklets—the tiaras. And they were her own—she often said so—that *her* father gave them to her."

"Yes. But——"

"Oh!" haughtily and tilting her rounded chin, "more 'buts.' There! I know what you would say—that they were only hers for a *time*. But how could my father help it if she *lost* them? And of course she lost them; because if she had sold them, there would be the money,—do you see? But there was never any money! Therefore they must be lost—I *know* they are lost."

"Amber!" She flashes an angry glance at him. Good heavens! *can* this be the gentle, dignified, calm girl of an hour ago? Is there electricity in this Irish soil—in this sad and misty Irish climate—that affects the souls of its daughters?

"Well?" He plucks up some courage even before this deadly wrath of hers. "Why *shouldn't* I call you by your name? I never heard of anyone's cousin calling one Miss or Mister. Come, now," argumentatively, "did you?"

"I don't know." She pauses. The charming head droops a little, all the rancour dies away, and in its place, as quickly as a sunbeam smiles through a cloud, a little smile widens her beautiful lips. "How *could* I? I never met a cousin before."

"Ah!" says he; "that accounts for it. And I feel that a kind Providence has sent me here to-day to teach you how to behave to one. It's rather a solemn thing,—the beginning,—but I'll show you. Now I take your hand—see?"—taking it. "And I say, Good-bye, Amber, and then you say, Good-bye, Hilary. Do you think you can manage it?"

"I'll try," demurely. "Good-bye, Hilary."

"Oh, excellent! excellent!" cries he. "A most apt pupil. Next time——"

"No, there will be no next time," her happy smile fading.

"There shall be," says Hilary. But she turns deliberately and runs down the path away from him. His eyes follow her until she is out of sight; then, with a quickening of his breath, he turns and makes for the hill she had pointed out.

He has hardly gone a few yards, however, before his attention is caught by a man who has jumped over a wall into the road,—a man of about forty, tall, dark, forbidding looking, handsome of a sort, and with a certain strength of character written on his low brow.

He goes by Hilary with a swing that has something of aggression in it; in passing, however, the eyes of the two men meet,—rage in one, contempt in the other. Both had seen each other before within the last three days. Then a turn in the road takes Brian Deane beyond the other's sight, and presently to the side of Amber.

"Who was that man you parted from just now?" demands he, as he catches her up. His tone is

harsh and rough ; his breath is coming from between his whitened lips in short, suppressed gasps ; his nostrils are dilated.

Amber regards him curiously. Her beautiful eyes run over the disorder of his face, as if not only surprised, but a little disgusted at the excitement so distinctly printed on it.

"That was Captain Adare, my cousin," returns she, deliberately.

"Your cousin !" His face twitches. "The nephew of the man who has dubbed your father a liar and thief!"

She grows a little white.

"The man, however, as you call him, is not Hilary Adare."

"And so you would condone the offence." He laughs derisively. "As though all those vipers were not bred in one nest. And pray how did this special viper, this cousin, this Hilary Adare, find his way here to-day ? By *your* connivance ? By *your* appointment ?"

Amber stands still and confronts him. She is quite calm.

"Talking of ways," says she, in her clear, soft voice ; "*this* is my way," turning to the left ; "see that yours leads somewhere else !"

CHAPTER V.

“But thy eternal summer shall not fade.”

“AFTER all, I’m rather glad we decided on coming,” says Mrs. Clarence, drawing the carriage rug closer round her. “Nothing at this dreadful woman’s party can be duller than the hours we should have spent at home. I wonder if she has changed, and what direction the change has—has . . .”

Here the landau drives into a heavy rut, so that whatever Mrs. Clarence would have said about Madam O’Flaherty is lost to posterity for ever. The shock is sufficiently great to unseat them all, in a measure. This to Mr. McGrath seems a most suitable opportunity of making himself unpleasant all round, so with a wild shriek of dismay he seizes May in his arms and holds her closely to him, while a frenzied expression grows upon his brow.

“Let me *go*, Owen! *Don’t!*” cries May, angrily pushing him from her.

“What on earth do you mean, McGrath?” exclaims Grey, furiously.

“I thought she was killed,” says Owen, with rather suspicious excitement. “Oh, Grey, what

should I—what should *you* have done had she been killed?”

“I don’t know,” returns Grey, so gruffly, so indifferently, as it seems to May, that for the whole of the remainder of the day she refuses so much as to look at him.

“Her *roads* haven’t changed, anyway,” says Mrs. Clarence, with disgust; her laces have been shaken a little out of place. “I expect neither is she. We shall have an awful time here, I *know*.”

“What is she like?” asks May, who has now had time to recover herself.

“As I remember her, she was a big, fat, dreadful creature, with a brogue you could sit on without fear of breaking down, and a nose——”

“You wouldn’t have her without a nose, would you?” asks her brother.

“Oh! don’t be more absurd than you can help, Owen,” Mrs. Clarence frowns at him. “If you feel amiable, *I* don’t. I think it is a monstrous thing, a perfect infliction, to be compelled to come here to-day just because this ridiculous old woman happens to be a sort of connection of Sir Lucien’s. He has made us come—said he’d arrive *after* us. Such a—*well*——”

“Only a moment ago you said you were glad you had decided on coming,” says her brother. “Really, these ruts are dreadful things,” with a sympathetic glance at Grey, who gives him a furious one in return. “In my opinion, Dolly, you hopped at the chance of going anywhere in this deserted region.”

This touches the truth so nearly that Mrs. Clarence resents it.

"Isn't he stupid? Isn't he a fool?" asks she, plaintively appealing largely to the others, who respond quite as largely, especially Gilbert Grey.

"She is so fearfully inquisitive," says Everard. "You know I met her at the Brownes the other day. She asked me every question under the sun."

"That's her first fault,—the most glaring. As for the others——"

"Don't let's go *too* deep," says Owen.

"I really feel," continues his sister, "as though I were preparing for a competitive examination when she addresses me."

"In which you will come out *last*," says Owen.

"Well, no," thoughtfully. "I don't think *that*. I have laid out a plan for myself. I am going to say 'I don't know' to any and every question she may ask me to-day."

"Lay you a fiver she gets the better of you," says her brother.

"Done!" says Mrs. Clarence, with a little grimace.

They have driven up to the hall door of "The Larches," Madam O'Flaherty's house, by this time, and Mrs. Clarence's last remark is hardly uttered before the hostess comes lumbering down from the topmost step of the stone flight to receive them.

So far as May can see (who is filled with curiosity), Madam O'Flaherty is distinctly remarkable. She is a gigantic woman, with three chins and a topknot. On the topknot rests a hat—a sailor hat that a girl of fifteen might have worn—perched at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"Here you are, here you are!" cries she, prancing

up to the door of the landau and pushing the footman triumphantly to one side. "So glad to see you all. But where is Lucien? No nonsense about his being engaged, now. I know all about that. He *can't* be. Faith," with a sudden thought, "'twould be a fool would be engaged to *him!*" Here she pauses in her rapid utterance to give way to a loud and raucous laugh in appreciation of her own wit.

Mrs. Clarence shudders.

"He—he's coming," says she, which is the readiest lie that occurs to her.

"He gave us distinctly to understand that *nothing* would keep him away," supplements her brother, nobly.

"Well, come along, come along," cries Madam O'Flaherty, with great hospitality. "Tea's over there in the tent, and soda water and"—with an expressive glance towards Gilbert and Owen that the merest chance keeps from being a wink—"the rest of it is in the billiard room. You may remember the billiard room, Mr. Everard?" who has just come up with Hilary in the dog-cart. "When my old man was above ground, he was the life and soul of that room. You'll show the rest of them the way, eh?"

"I shall be charmed," says Everard. "But in the mean time you will let us see your beautiful grounds, will you not?"

"Ah! you were always the jeuce at compliments!" says Madam O'Flaherty, beaming at him cordially from under the sailor hat. "But won't you come in first? Do now!" affectionately; "come in and have just a soupsong after your drive."

direction the consolation lies. Is it that Sir Lucien *can't* take his place with the good niggers, or . . .

"And how's your pa?" asks Madam, recovering her spirits in a wonderful way. "I haven't had a line from him for six months, though, as you know, Kilfern and I are first cousins, and your mother, Lady Kilfern, was very fond of me." (This, strange to say, is true, though Lady Kilfern was a very cold, haughty woman, and the daughter of one of the oldest baronets in England.) "How's his gout?"

"Very little better."

"And the property, how's that going?" Her eyes change and grow sharp. The spirit of curiosity is again strong within her. "You ought to keep your eye on that, you know. Rents," with a poor attempt at not caring to hear the answer, "down, I suppose?"

"No—up," says Mr. McGrath, with an eloquent wave of his hands towards the skies. "There's nothing the tenants won't give my dad this year. You'll hardly believe me, but he's got to implore them to *lower* them. He has declared to them he will be embarrassed with his riches if they persist in bringing him such big bags of money as they have been doing for the last six weeks!"

"I'll be even with you yet," says Madam, with a grim smile, not in the least disconcerted, although baffled about her queries with regard to Kilfern's estate. And at this moment coming to the conclusion that the "sorting" is getting "no forrarder," she plunges into the thick of a party near her and for the moment is lost to sight.

CHAPTER VI.

“There is a garden in her face
Where roses and white lilies grow.”

ADARE, after a few moments lost in getting away from the others, goes straight to where, across the shaven tennis courts, the slender figure is bending over the bank.

“After all, in spite of your unfriendly wish, you see we *have* met again,” says he, in a low tone.

She starts as one might who has been suddenly roused from a dream filled with the saddest import, and some light leaves that she had been holding drop with a little jerk into the stream and sail away hurriedly, as if in desperate haste to get to the end of all things. This momentary sign of agitation is all she shows. Her face is calm, if smileless, as she turns it to him.

“You were the cleverest prophet,” she says, giving him her hand.

“What a strange task you have allotted yourself!” he goes on, pleasantly; “and,” with a glimmer of amusement, “on such an important occasion, too! Casting leaves into a river! Such an occupation is fraught with thought.”

"Well, yes. I was thinking," slowly.

"But thought at a garden party!" he laughs. "Is this doing your duty to your neighbour? Is there, then, no one here to whom you will deign to speak?"

A faint change crosses her face. It is so faint that the fact of his seeing it is noticeable.

"There are only a very few here," says she, with a clear enunciation born of great courage and perhaps greater pride, "who would deign to notice me."

"What folly is this?" asks he, with a frown. "Who is there here who would dare——"

"Ah, you forget." The pale pink of her face grows paler. "All the county knows of the loss of those jewels that after my mother should have come to Sir Lucien. That knowledge has branded my father's name with infamy, and I,"—spreading her hands a little abroad,— "as I reminded you before, am my father's daughter."

"This must be put an end to."

"It is very difficult to put an end to slanders," says the girl, gently, if bitterly. "Many here believe in that stupid lie."

"But this is monstrous," says Adare. "I thought this—this—idea—this old story—was confined to our family alone. A mere diseased fancy of Sir Lucien's brain, as of late" (he does not explain *how* late) "I have learned to regard it. You mean to tell me that the people—the idiots—round here hold you responsible for——"

"Oh, no, you must not run away with things. I really do not know what they hold me responsible for; but I do know that they will not receive me."

"Yet you are here to-day?" He questions her gravely, anxiously; it would be impossible to find fault with him.

"Madam is a sort of cousin of mine, you know, as"—with a faint frown—"she is a cousin of yours, too. Let us say"—with a supercilious lifting of her charming brows—"she has a more liberal spirit than most. The very fact of her being connected with me should have militated against her being attentive to me. *You* can see that——"

"I can see that you can be unjust," says he, slowly and reproachfully. "I too am your cousin, and——"

But she will not hear him.

"I don't know why I accepted her invitation," with a burst of impatience that conceals God knows what tortures of pride; "why I came here to-day. The moment I answered it I regretted so mad a step. But Madam insisted on it."

"Then she——"

"She is the one kind friend I have on earth," says Amber, her earnest eyes on his. Adare is conscious of a shock of surprise. That big, awful, ungainly, inquisitive—*vulgarly* inquisitive—creature to pose as protector to this desolate little thing! the championship of whom will bring her no kudos of any sort. Surely human nature is strange to the verge of comedy. Anyway, Hilary tells himself he will never forget Madam's kindness to this poor little cousin of his.

"It's abominable," says he. "I'll take care it shan't continue. I'll"—in his vehemence—his rage—his *pain* (though he has not come to know it like that yet) he

goes a little too far—" *make* that old man acknowledge you."

She winces slightly; then, with a flash,—

"There is no acknowledgment to be made. I am his niece quite as much as you are his nephew. He cannot lie about that."

"I know—I know," hastily, seeing his mistake. "But this scandal. *That* can be put an end to by his receiving you."

"Oh, *don't!*" cries she, fiercely, if in a very low tone. Her face has lost all its colour. "You mean to be kind—I know you do; but every word—it *hurts* so! Oh!"—faintly,—“can't you see that I will not be received as a favour by the man who has made my father's name a byword in the county?"

"I can see, indeed. But look here, Amber; sit down here for a moment," pointing to the grassy bank, "and let us talk it over. *None* of us, you know, can afford to defy fate. We"—reluctantly—"are almost strangers, and I feel I have no right to dictate to you a line for this or that; but in spite of what I say, I implore you for your own good—yours *only*"—(he must have felt some twinges of conscience here, because his tone grows absolutely fervid) "to accept any olive branch that Sir Lucien may hold out to you. For one thing,"—earnestly,—“he is an old man, and you——"

"Well, go on—what am I?" with a little cynical laugh, that in spite of her has some amusement in it. "But why go into it?" scornfully. "Is a man like Sir Lucien likely to hold out even a dead twig?"

"I shall see that he does."

Her brow contracts.

"I beg you will take no trouble of any sort about me." She rises. Her face is clouded and her beautiful lips show a sense of great resentment. "It would be the merest waste of time. I should never accept apology, or hospitality of any sort, from the man who so cruelly and openly maligned my father."

"You are sure he did so openly?"

"Quite sure."

"And your mother?"

"*She* was spared,"—contemptuously,—“though the jewels were always in her possession, not in my father's. But then,” with a curl of her lip, “my mother chanced to be Sir Lucien's sister, and of course no suspicion of disgrace could be allowed to touch *her*.”

"Is that so bad a sentiment, after all?" says Adare, purposely ignoring her real meaning,—the selfish regard of Sir Lucien for his *own* respectability. "She was his sister. Of course he would protect her. That is the meaning of kinship. Do you think—to take another case—that, finding you now to be my cousin, I would not protect *you*?"

Is there a touch of passion in his tone? For a moment they stand looking into each other's eyes, and then slowly Amber gives way; her glance falls from his face to his shoulder, and then to the ground.

"I must go back to Esther," she says, quietly, taking a step forward that shows him even more than her words that she is bent on leaving him.

"Miss Deane is here?"

"Yes, she is over there."

Adare glances in the direction indicated, and looks hard at a small, fragile woman sitting on a garden chair. She looks entirely harmless, but a second thought conveys to him the impression that she could be obstinate, or firm, or determined; there are so many terms for it. Certainly her chin, short and upturned, looks a little unscrupulous. His glance wanders idly from Miss Deane to the man standing next to her. It is Deane; that strange, unpleasant fellow whom Sir Lucien will persist in believing is in league with the purloiner of those abominable and troublesome lost stones.

"Good-bye," says Amber; "my cousin, I know, is waiting for me."

"So is your other cousin, her brother," says Adare. "He seems, judging from the eye he keeps on you, to be an excellent chaperon." He smiles in an ordinary way, yet studies her face closely as he speaks.

"You mistake; he has nothing to do with me. Esther is my chaperone!" says Amber, flushing and moving forward, as if to put an end to such unpleasant questionings.

"One moment," quickly. "You will let me introduce my sister to you?"

"To what purpose?" Her tone is cold, repellent, but there are tears in her eyes.

"To make you known to each other; to—— Amber, do not refuse me this!"

"Oh,"—petulantly,— "I refuse you nothing. It is

useless. I refused to see you again the last—the *first*—time we met, and yet *now*——”

“You *will* meet her, then?”

“If—if your sister wishes to know me, I feel that to say no would be . . .”

She stops abruptly. May with Gilbert Grey is almost at their side.

“May, this is our cousin, Amber O’Connell,” says Hilary at once. “And this,” indicating Grey, “is a cousin of yours and ours also. Mr. Grey, Miss O’Connell.”

“How d’ye do?” says May, the introduction to Grey having given her time to recover her extreme surprise, and holding out her hand with a warmth that goes far to kill for Amber those sad beliefs of hers as to the cruelty of all her mother’s relations. “I was here some years ago, but we did not meet then.”

“I was in Paris with my mother.”

“Happy you! But now that we have met I hope we shall be friends.”

“Poor old Molly,” as her brother *used* to call Miss Adare, is now “*Good* old Molly” in his estimation, with several other admiring adjectives thrown in.

“It takes time,” says Amber, her earnest eyes fixed on May’s.

“To make a friendship? Oh, but”—holding out her hand—“not *much* time when it has to do with you and me.” So prettily she says it that Amber, with a sudden smile that makes her beautiful face still more lovely, lays her hand in hers.

“It is a bargain,” says May, gaily.

"Yes, even if—which is most likely—we never meet again."

"Oh, but we shall—we shall!" says May. "Going? Well, remember our bargain. I shall come and see you soon—very soon."

* * * * *

A general adieu is now being made in spite of Madam's loud-voiced entreaties that they will stay; till *when*, she does not make explicit, but till the crack of doom, judging by the affection of her manner. Mrs. Clarence, who is feeling a little bored, had been eager to go quite half an hour ago; but, unfortunately, Owen could not be found. Mr. Everard, who has been now sent on the quest, runs him to earth, after much trouble, in a distant corner of the shrubberies, where he seems to have been enjoying a most peaceful and happy time with a Miss Bailey, a very pretty girl living in the neighbourhood.

Everard is conscious of a slight feeling of not so much surprise, perhaps, as curiosity, when he finds that Miss Bailey's shoe is in Mr. McGrath's hand. Of course her foot is not in the shoe, but still——

Miss Bailey, however, is quite equal to the occasion.

"It came off just now as I was walking through those wretched brambles outside," says she, calmly, addressing Everard, whom she does not know; "and now he wants to put it on. But I shan't let him. I"—turning her extremely pretty eyes on Owen—"shan't indeed. Not if you were to sit there for ever."

"I'm really afraid he can't do that," says Everard,

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"I'm really afraid he can't do that," says Everard,

regretfully. "I'm so sorry to interfere with your sitting there for ever, Owen, in such charming company, but your sister is waiting for you. She is going home."

"The going of all the sisters in Europe shall not make *me* go from my spoken word," declares Mr. McGrath, settling himself back in his seat with folded arms and a brow stern with determination.

"This is dreadful," says Everard. "Can I be of any use? Can I——" He glances at the shoe.

"Oh, if you will both put it on *together*," says Miss Bailey, "it won't trouble me so much. But it must be *together*!"

Mr. McGrath, seeing his way to thus keeping his honour intact, the shoe—a very dainty one—is restored to its foot, which is even daintier, and Miss Bailey rises to her feet and the occasion.

"Good-bye," says she, gravely, giving Owen her hand.

"You must let us escort you to the house," says Everard.

"No, thanks." Miss Bailey gives a little glance over his shoulder. "I think I see my mother over there. I shall go *this* way."

"You won't forget the third waltz," whispers Owen, affectionately.

"You know it *depends*."

She has tripped away airily.

"Waltz!" says Everard. "Where's there going to be a waltz down here?"

"Madam told me she'd give a dance if Sir Lucien would."

“Which means that your chance of a waltz with that particular charming and—er—ingenuous Miss Bailey lies in the far far distance.”

“Not a bit of it,” says Mr. McGrath. “I’ll tackle the old boy. And if the worst comes to the worst, we’ll chain him and send out the invitations.”

Everard has not time to recover from this audacious proposal before the carriage is in sight, and Mrs. Clarence has ordered Owen to his seat in it.

She seems to be in a desperate hurry to get back to “dinner and respectability,” as she puts it. “Really, the people there to-day were for the most part insufferable. I *did* pity us all. That ‘Mrs. Madam’ ought to be taken up!”

“By you?” inquires her brother, innocently. “I daresay a season in town under your wing might——”

He is never allowed to finish his sentence.

CHAPTER VII.

“Mere waste of time.”

“I SHALL call on her,” says May. Dinner is over, and Sir Lucien having stalked off as usual to the cold seclusion of his library, they are all free to discuss everything in earth or heaven. “Dolly, you’ll come with me, won’t you?”

“Delighted,” says Mrs. Clarence. “Anything for a sensation in this benighted spot. When”—languidly—“do you start? Now?” “Now” is ten o’clock.

“Oh, if you’re going to be sarcastic,” says May. “Gilbert, will you come?”

“If Grey goes, *I* don’t,” declares Mr. McGrath, with determination, in the tone of hidden devotion to May that he knows always incenses Grey.

“I haven’t asked you, Owen,” Miss Adare reminds him, with a touch of dignity.

“You and Dolly had better go alone, if you mean it,” says Adare. There’s a vibration in his voice, a sudden sharp interest, that makes Everard raise his eyes from the magazine he is reading to cast a furtive glance at him.

“But why go?” asks Mrs. Clarence, lazily. “It seems such a silly visit, with no meaning in it. Now,

if we called to ask her to spend a week here—you know I suggested that at first—there would be something in it. But as it is——”

“I’m afraid that would be hopeless,” says May.

“*Why* should it be?” says Adare. “*Why*”—frowning—“should our cousin not be asked here? She has had nothing to do with the loss of those jewels, at all events.”

“If anyone were to suggest to Sir Lucien that she *had* something to do with them, he’d ask her here at once,” says Mrs. Clarence, with an air of lazy amusement.

“But who would suggest it?” It is May’s question.

“*I* would,” says Mrs. Clarence, with her mischievous little laugh. “Shall I?”

Once again Everard lifts his eyes to study Hilary’s face. Here is the test.

“Certainly not.” Adare’s voice is cold and decisive. “It would be an insult to—to any girl to be laid under such a suspicion.”

“You would never make a Jesuit, Hilary,” says Mrs. Clarence, who looks amused—has she, too, divined his secret?—“you would not countenance the evil out of which good might come.”

“For all that, I’ll ask him,” declares May. “I’ll risk it. He can’t eat me, and I’d love to have her here. Isn’t she pretty? Isn’t she a darling? You know Uncle Lucien has been interviewing that cousin of hers, Mr. Deane, ever since he came down here, questioning him about those stones that are lost; and as Uncle Lucien is very angry with him

because he can't find out anything from him, he might like to spite him by asking Amber here."

"How would that spite Mr. Deane?" asks Gilbert Grey.

"Because"—airily—"Mr. Deane is in love with Amber."

"*What?*" says Adare.

"Oh, yes, it's quite true, Hilary. I know. I saw how he *looked* at her yesterday!" There is a pause. Really, from May, who is the gayest of all butterflies, this is immense.

"*Our* little May!" murmurs Mr. McGrath, faintly. "Sounds like the name of a short story, don't it? To think that *she*——"

Somebody throws a cushion at him.

"What an awful gown Madam had on to-day!" says Mrs. Clarence, turning the conversation. "Good heavens! What a shade! It made my eyes burn. And so old—so——" Words fail her.

"It ought to be turned out to grass," agrees her brother, pathetically. "It's too old to work."

"I like her," says Adare. This is so sudden, so unexpected, that they all look at him.

"Really, I think, so do I." May, as a rule, always follows her brother's lead. "She isn't half bad, and I think it was rather nice of her to think of giving a dance."

"She won't give one unless Sir Lucien does."

"Well, he may," says Owen.

"Why not?" puts in May, valiantly.

At this all laugh or jeer as is their nature to.

"Fancy believing Sir Lucien would put one hand

before the other to please anyone," says Mrs. Clarence. "You and May must be full of faith. I can't say how I admire you! As for me, I have none. You see, I have made him a special study for so many years."

And she is quite right, as the future proves. When the subject was broached to Sir Lucien, his indignation knew no bounds. A dance in *his* house! Never!

Despair fell upon the younger members of his household; but presently, when Madam O'Flaherty, after calling Sir Lucien "an old wretch" and various other unpleasant names, thus relieving her feelings nobly, declared herself eager to give her dance "in spite of him," peace was restored with honour! But this is anticipating.

"Well, if he won't, he won't," says Owen, taking all the airs of an advanced philosopher, "and if Madam will, she will. There's comfort somewhere! Though, after all,"—falling suddenly from his late high level to a very despondent one,—“who knows? How is one to trust anybody nowadays?”

"By their faces," says Everard, who never in his life trusted anybody.

"Hers is like a soup-tureen?" says McGrath, pensively. "How does one trust a soup-tureen?"

"Oh!" says May, "you can't take people feature by feature."

"Can't I? What a pity! There are some people I would gladly take by one feature now and again." Does his eye rest on Grey?

"I had quite a long conversation with Madam," goes on May in her prattling fashion. "She is ever

so nice and pleasant when one forgets her queer manners and *looks*, which certainly are awful! She grew quite confidential with me, and old ladies don't, as a rule, care about talking to girls, you know."

"Ah! the modesty, the *modesty* of her!" says Owen, with a rapt gaze that brings Grey to the verge of murder.

"And," May goes on, without heeding, "though she looks so big and so strong, do you know she is very delicate——"

Here even Everard, who laughs on very rare occasions, gives way.

"Oh! very well." May is evidently affronted. She casts a scathing glance at Grey, who, too, has succumbed to mirth in spite of all his efforts; a vision of Madam, bouncing, red, vigorous, in the sailor hat, proving too much for him. "But I can tell you it is true. She told me that she suffers greatly from neuralgia and asthma and——"

"Did she, by any chance," interrupts Mr. McGrath, looking as if he were athirst for information, "amongst all her many ailments, mention fatty degeneration of the *nose*?"

"No," very angrily.

"What I principally object to," says Mrs. Clarence, plaintively, breaking into the conversation as one might who believes war imminent, and would like to circumvent it, "as I think I told you before, is her inquisitiveness. That"—even more plaintively—"is a long word, isn't it? But she was queerer than ever to-day."

"More searching in her remarks?"

"Far more. But I baffled her, I think. Owen," to a carefully inattentive brother, "you owe me five pounds."

"That's easily said, my good child," says Owen, who finds it impossible to evade her. "But the proofs—the proofs?"

"The proofs are that she asked me more questions than I can remember, and that I never answered any one of them."

"But how," asks Adare, who has grown interested because he also has suffered at Madam's hands, "do you manage it?"

"Yes, tell us," says May.

"I said 'I don't know' to everything."

"Oh! impossible."

"It sounds so," says Mrs. Clarence, triumphantly; "but really I did it. It was a feat; I shall always be proud of it. First she got me into a corner, like over there, behind that screen, where"—with an eloquent gesture—"escape was *not*, as"—with a little *moue*—"she thought, and then she began, 'Where is your husband now, my dear?' 'I don't know,' I said. 'How extraordinary! I heard lately he was in the Corea, or *was* it in Constantinople?' 'I don't know, Madam.' 'Now I think of it,' said she, 'it was the coast of Borneo.' 'Was it? I don't know,' said I, sweetly. 'He is coming home shortly, anyway, isn't he?' She was getting a little furious here, and this gave me strength. 'I don't know,' I said, with my best smile. 'You hear from him occasionally. He tells you how he is going on . . .

How is he going on?' 'I don't know.' 'You'—she was very angry here—'ought to know! You are his wife, I suppose? You *feel* like a wife?' It was an awful question. 'I don't know,' I said. At that she grew mad. 'Are you a woman *at all*?' cried she. 'I don't know,' I cried in turn, quite plaintively. And at that she fled. I have come to the conclusion," says Dolly, thoughtfully, "that if you say 'I don't know' straight through your life you will come out at the other end of it a most immaculate person. I wish I had learned the lesson earlier. By-the-bye, Owen, that five pounds is mine, isn't it? I *do* deserve it."

"Oh!—er—our bet?" says Mr. McGrath, to whom a fiver means something.

"Next week will do," says his sister, turning away.

"Got to pay, old man," murmurs Gilbert Grey, in a whisper, out of which in vain he tries to take the sounding note of joy. "Your sister's won."

"Has she?" says Owen, gloomily.

"Can there be a doubt?"

McGrath eyes him heavily.

"*I don't know*," says he, copying his sister's voice to a nicety. "But there's one thing I *do* know—that my sister is damn smart!"

"My *dear* fellow!"

"I don't care a——"

"Oh, *not* again!"

"She certainly *is* a little troublesome about asking questions," May is saying to Everard, *à propos* of Madam O'Flaherty.

"A regular Magnall," says Owen, who is still gloomy. "She rakes one fore and aft."

"I think she ought to be put in the Litany and prayed for," says Mrs. Clarence.

"So do I," growls Grey, thoughtful. "A woman who could put caraway seeds in a sponge cake is——"

"*Past* praying for," says Everard, who had in a sad moment eaten some of the dreadful compound in question.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Youth, I do adore thee.

O! my love, my love is young!”

By a singular clause in the will of Sir Lucien Adare's grandfather, some old and absolutely unique jewels were to go to the eldest daughter of the house on her marriage—to be held by her in pawn, as it were, until she either had a son or died. If she died without leaving a son to inherit them, they went back to the head of the family. The head of the family in this instance meant Sir Lucien. Sir Lucien's father, Sir John Adare, had left three children, the present baronet and his brother—who had died very shortly after May's birth, and when Hilary was about seven years old—and an only daughter Lilian. The latter was the idol of his heart.

She was a wilful, wild, disobedient creature, extraordinarily beautiful, but perverse and unmanageable; yet the old man adored her for her beauty, and even when she openly and defiantly married a man who was half a bankrupt already (it did not take her long to make him one completely),—a mere mill-owner, a person who, though his forefathers had been of decent birth, had never been received into the society round,—he forgave her. Forgave

her so completely as to absolutely refuse to dispute her right to those old jewels, which she most insolently demanded, and which were worth, as Everard had said, a king's ransom, although his eldest son Lucien had almost resorted to violence to compel him to do so.

"It was a sacrilege!" said Lucien, fighting then as always for his rights. "There must be some law to prevent the giving away of a huge fortune to a mere contemptible miller."

But the old man was obstinate. He would not dispute that strange clause in his father's will. Lilian was to have the jewels for her lifetime, and after her they would go to her son. If there was no son, Lucien would have them—in time.

As a fact there was no son, only a little daughter born after many years; a tiny thing carried hither and thither; from Paris to Berlin, from Berlin to Italy, and back again wherever the wilful, restless mother elected to go. If to travel means a liberal education, Amber was indeed highly educated; she learned to speak many languages; she caught a grace of manner that held to her always; she was distinctly strong on geography, so far as Europe was concerned, but she was disgracefully weak on the tender mercies of one's neighbours.

When she was fifteen her mother died, leaving the girl to her father's care. A short guardianship, as he died six months later, unable, some said, to survive the beautiful woman who had so cruelly treated him, so recklessly ruined him.

Even as she lay on her death-bed, Lucien (now

Sir Lucien) had begun inquiries about the jewels. But Mrs. O'Connell had laughed at him, and had indeed died flouting him. He should never see them—never!

She had beckoned to the stupid man who had married her, and had not even sense enough to repent, and pulling him down to her with her thin arms in a last eager effort, had whispered something into his ear. He was “to promise—to *swear*.” She was dying, and he promised. He had been her slave all his life; it was not likely that when grief intolerable held him, he should even try to break his bonds.

Resolutely ignored by her family all along, when he declared ignorance of the whereabouts of the jewels after her death, no one believed him. His own death six months later complicated matters.

That the stones, the sapphire necklace especially, had been sold was a preposterous idea. The necklace was famous, and indeed the central sapphire was supposed to be the largest in the world. The great engines of the law were set to work, but nothing came of all their whirligigs. And from then to now no tale nor tidings of the missing jewels had been heard.

Of late, however, a month or two ago, the knowledge that Brian Deane, O'Connell's nephew, had come back from abroad “on business” had come to Sir Lucien's ears. Business? What business could a man of Deane's stamp have in Ireland? He was doing tolerably well in Australia as a sheep farmer. But business in such a remote little corner of the world as Carrig! When Sir Lucien's lawyer in

London saw nothing in his coming, Sir Lucien told him, with all his usual urbanity, that he was a fool, and started straight for Carrig; and as he hated being alone, without someone on whom to exercise his caustic wit and vile temper, he made a virtue of necessity, and tried to *compel* some of his relations and *entreat* others to accompany him. Finally he got together neither those who were compelled or were entreated, but a few who from various reasons desired to get out of town for a bit. Amongst them, as we know, Hilary Adare, his nephew and heir.

* * * * *

"May, look here," says Captain Adare, pulling his sister into the library after luncheon. "Did you mean what you said last night?"

"About Amber?"

"Yes. That you were going to get him to ask her here?"

"Of course I meant it."

His surprise at her courage renders him dumb for a moment.

"Well—ask him now," says he.

"I could have asked him five minutes ago only for you. You would keep talking of partridges. However, 'now,' as you call it, is always the best time." As she speaks she leaves the room.

Adare, thus abandoned to his own thoughts, gives them up to nothing but wonder at the courage that can lie within so frail a body. As for *him*! Big and strong as he is, he would have thought for many days before plucking up courage to tackle Sir Lucien on such a question as this—or any other, either!

He is still wondering when May returns.

"Well," says he, anticipating defeat.

"It is well. I am to invite her to come here on Friday. This day week."

"No?"

"Yes, really. Of course he has something on his mind. I think from what he said that he believes Brian Deane is in love with her, and that her coming here—her being acknowledged—will please him so much that he will give in and make some sort of a compromise about those stones. I was wrong when I thought he would ask her here to *spite* him. But really, Hilary, I don't think that dreadful man Deane knows anything of them, and even if he did, Amber's coming would not induce him to give them up."

"Oh! he's *mad* on the point of those stones," says Hilary, impatiently. "I don't believe he'll ever see or hear of them again. But all that is beside the mark. Do you mean to tell me, in cold blood, that Sir Lucien has actually given you permission to ask Am—our cousin—here?"

"He has, indeed. But, Hilary, why are you so——" She hesitates.

"So what?"

"So glad?"

"Well, because—because I love her, I think," says Adare, quite simply. "And as for you, how can I thank you? How can I show my gratitude? What would you like, May?"

"I don't want anything," says May. "Not really!"

"Unreally, then? Too late to offer you a doll, I suppose?"

To his surprise, May's face turns scarlet. Fancy her caring so much about that good old tease!

"Oh! by the way——" he muses. Gilbert Grey comes into his musings.

"Never mind, then," says he. "It shan't be a doll. It shall be a——" He doesn't go further, but it resolves itself later on into a charming gold and pearl bangle, that is the joy of her heart for a week or so. He contents himself, and the gratitude within him at the present, by stroking her hair the wrong way up, as men always do when they forget themselves and feel really affectionate.

"Oh! *don't!*" says May, with a little frown. Her hair is hopelessly disarranged. Then all at once she laughs. "Don't rub up *her* hair like that," says she, "because if you do, she'll certainly refuse you!" She grows frightened here, and very grave. Her own words spoken aloud have laid bare the truth and the probably terrible consequences. "Oh! am I right, Hilary, in doing this—in helping you? Is it wise of you to—to think of a girl who——"

"Is the one girl in the world for me?" says Hilary. "No use in going over and over it, May. She is the one girl!"

"But there was that other girl, Miss Yardley, you know. I thought——"

"Oh! nonsense!" says Adare. But he grows very red, for all that. Miss Yardley had once been "the prettiest girl in the world," and, therefore, now her very name is hateful to him, as being an insult to Amber. "As if a fellow can't look at a girl without

all his sisters and cousins and aunts considering him in love with her."

"Oh, yes, of course; I see. I *quite* see. But—now *don't* fly out at me again—but what I'm afraid of is that as a wife for you she is hardly desirable!"

"Look here," says Adare, shortly, "I'll put it to you straight. If Gilbert Grey came under the head of 'undesirable,' would you throw him over?"

"Oh! that's absurd," says May, colouring hotly. "One can't throw over one who hasn't——"

"Well, but if he had—would you?"

"It's so stupid," says she.

"Well, hang it! Can't you say? *Would* you?"

"How horrid you are, Hilary!" She is now walking angrily away from him. She turns, however, at the last moment. "I'll do what I can for you and your Amber," says she, in a muffled tone, "in spite of your horridness. But I never thought it of you, Hilary!"

CHAPTER IX.

“As day went down the music grew apace.”

It is very close on October, and the young hounds are being brought out, in the light of the now somewhat surly mornings, with a view to looking after their education. It is early, no doubt, to think of knocking knowledge into them (this does not apply so much to their tender years as to the hour of the day), but Kinahan, the old huntsman, who has for thirty years held high mastership over the kennels at Carrig Castle,—kennels kept up to do Sir Lucien justice, whether he is here or not,—thinking very highly of the coming lot of pups, has elected (incited thereto by Mr. McGrath) to bring them out this morning,—a delicious, if rather chilly one,—with sunshine sparkling on the slightly frosted leaves: there was a little hoar frost last night,—a matter that is now regarded by Kinahan as a special injustice on the part of Nature.

Adare, dragged out of his bed by Owen, started with them, followed them through brake and brier, sympathised deeply with old Kinahan's loud curses over the shortcomings of some of his pack—saw things out to the end really; and then, finding himself and his horse on the top of a hill that looks

straight down on the old mill, hesitates about going home, though he is starving with hunger. Finally—love is a great satisfier—he rushes his good little mare down the hill and makes straight for the mill. Will she be there?

When a man is in love, who backs him up? Not his *own* fellows; they all count him fool! Women don't, however! The man who loves them is wise, say they.

Hilary, having left his horse in the care of a woman whose cabin is noticeable from the road, goes on foot to the mill. Yesterday May had told him of Sir Lucien's consent to her asking Amber to the Castle. To-day he will tell Amber—try to persuade her to accept the invitation. But will she be here? A turn in the road shows him the window in the old mill where first he had seen her, and again a little, slim figure—not now in white, indeed, but in dark blue serge—catches his eye.

Adare's step quickens, and very soon he has passed over the sodden grasses and weeds lying so thickly and darkly in the enclosure round the old ruin, and having come to the torn-down doorway, mounts the steps with a beating heart, if a glad one, and all at once sees himself in her presence.

"Finding myself here, so close, I thought, you know, seeing you in the window, I might——"

Thus far he flounders, getting redder with every word, when she stops him with a smile.

"Of *course* you might," says she, very prettily. Her own face is not innocent of Nature's dye.

"I'm so awfully muddy," says he, glancing down

at his breeches and boots, that are indeed a good deal splashed. He is providentially unaware of the huge blobs of mud that adorn his nose and the corner of his left eye, or his confusion would have been worse confounded; but it is not until he gets home, considerably later, that he becomes aware of these facial adornments, and gives way on the head of them to a few strong but well-chosen adjectives.

"The roads *must* be bad to-day. However,"—with a little laugh,—“I was prepared for you. I saw you coming.”

“You *did*,”—reproachfully,—“yet made no sign. You might have given me some *small* encouragement.”

“I might have waved my handkerchief, certainly,” with a little provocative glance at him from under her long lashes. “It would have been artistic—mediæval—of the long, long ago days; and really sometimes”—with a sudden change of tone that has perhaps a sigh in it—“I *do* sometimes feel like Mariana in her moated grange.”

“That’s the very last thing you could ever be,” says Adare, with healthy certainty. “Wherever you were, even if it were a locked-up tower or a donjon keep, he would be sure to come to you. Nothing would prevent him.”

He is quite unaware of the force with which he speaks, or the personal turn the expression of his eye has given to this speech. Therefore, when a little warm blush grows from Amber’s chin to the roots of her sweet, soft hair, a pang shoots through his heart.

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"Perhaps he has come already," says he, blurting out his fear at once.

"Oh, no, no; no, indeed!" says Amber, quickly, her eyes resting earnestly on his. "But it's stupid to talk like this, isn't it? About"—with a little frown—"you or me, I mean."

"I can't think that there could be anything better to talk about than you," says he, growing bold through the relief that her denial of another has given him. There is no faintest thought of disbelieving her; her eyes so clear, so calm, her mouth so beautiful and steadfast, would shame to death any suspicion of her, even in the grossest mind.

"Well—but——" She finds herself at a loss; then, by a valiant effort, thinks of something that will overcome the awkward moment.

"How are you out so early?"

"Cub-hunting."

"You must have left home at dawn, then. Sit down there, won't you?"

"In the dark almost, and"—laughing—"with a most uncommonly bad breakfast. Our beloved uncle's servants don't run to much."

"And *no* luncheon!" with quite a horrified air.

"Oh, I expect when I get back I'll be able to knock something out of the butler."

"Then you ought to go *at once*," says she.

"Oh, I say, I *do* call that uncivil," says Adare. In spite of the incivility, however, he holds on fast to the seat (an old box) she has offered him, and shows no disposition to withdraw.

"You must be starving," says she. "If——" She

hesitates, then stoops and pulls from beneath a broken-down old bit of board that once had represented, perhaps, part of a sill to the window—now destitute of sill and sash and shutter—a stout little basket, and nervously, and very shyly, bending her head lower than she really need with a view to hiding her face, says, softly, “I brought some sandwiches here with me; I—made them myself. I—Esther thinks me very unsociable, but I do love to come down here and be alone, sometimes, for a little while. I’m afraid”—shamefacedly—“they are not very nice sandwiches, and”—here she seems to grow quite broken-hearted—“there is only lemonade. But if you *will*——”

“I will, indeed,” says Adare, “and with all my heart, too,” seeing that to refuse her will chagrin her sadly, though indeed there are not many sandwiches. “And as for lemonade, I love it! It’s one of the best drinks I know. Ever make it in a jug, with lemons and sugar and things? Tip-top, I can tell you. And these sandwiches! Do you mean you made them yourself? They’re like wafers. You’re a perfect Sybarite! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Go on! I’ve had two; you’ve had only one.”

“Oh, no; they are all for you,” says Amber, who is now in her gayest of gay spirits.

“For *me*! I like that! But what have we here?” diving into the stout little basket and bringing up a small loaf and a pat of butter.

“Oh! *fancy* my forgetting those!” says Amber. “They were for my little boy, who lives on the hill

coming of his sister's visit on Friday next and the invitation from Sir Lucien.

"I've got something to tell you," says he. "You won't like it, I'm afraid, but—Sir Lucien wants you to come and stay with us for a week or so."

Amber stares at him.

"Sir Lucien—Sir Lucien wants me to—— Oh!" —turning away—"it is absurd."

"It is not, indeed. And I entreat you to accept his invitation."

"I—to accept it."

"Yes. Why not? Look here now"—eagerly—"you are mad with him because you say he has made all the countryside round believe your father had a hand in the selling or doing away with these jewels. Well, if you accept this invitation, all your neighbours will hear of your being a visitor at your uncle's house, and it will do away with all that old gossip, won't it?"

"I don't know," says Amber, in a troubled tone. She had been carried away somewhat by his eloquence—an eloquence that came from his heart.

"It will vindicate your father's memory. It will, indeed. You can see that," goes on Hilary, pressing his advantage and feeling like a modern Machiavelli—a veritable Jesuit. Surely he, if anyone ever was guilty of it, is doing evil that good may come; for very well he knows that the invitation to Amber would never have been given by Sir Lucien but for his belief that Deane knows something of the missing jewels. And to get at Deane through Amber—— The idea had struck Sir Lucien as worthy of consideration.

“If I thought that——” says she, slowly.

“You *may* think it. You *must*.”

“Well, I’ll go,” says she. “Not that I want to, you know”—puckering up her pretty brows into a convincing frown—“but——”

“That’s a promise,” says he, joyfully. He holds out his hands, and she, with a little laugh that disperses the charming frown at once, lays hers in his.

Dear little hands! In the delight of the moment—the triumph of her consent—he stoops, as if to kiss them; then, even in the act of stooping, stops short. His eyes become riveted on one of the pretty hands he holds—the right one. Every particle of colour in his face dies away.

“Amber,” says he, straightening himself and speaking slowly, and certainly with difficulty, “where did you get those rings?”

CHAPTER X.

“When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,
I all alone bewEEP my outcast state.”

HE is still staring, as if fascinated, as if disbelieving the sight of his own eyes, at her hand. On it shine two rings; one is a magnificent sapphire, the other a circlet of opals with a diamond of great value in its centre. Adare knows them. The old descriptive list of the missing jewels, lent, under certain conditions, to Amber’s mother, is well known to him. These two rings, amongst many other far more important possessions, assuredly belong to the lost collection.

“These?” Amber spread out her small, lovable, brown little hands before her and lets the rings—the wonderful rings—that shine upon them, make full play in the fitful light. “Aren’t they pretty? I only wear them sometimes. I don’t know why I put them on to-day. But I’m glad now, because you can see them. Mother gave them to me. They are pretty, aren’t they?” She pauses, but is so taken up with her delight in her jewelled toys (the poor child has had very few toys of any sort in her strange wandering life, and very little love too!) that she does not notice how he lifts his head, that has been low-

ered, and makes an effort as if to speak—an effort beyond him for the moment.

“Do you know, sometimes,” goes on Amber, happily, as if delighting in her subject, “when the sun shines on them, I think they are like all the flowers on earth caught together in one big glimmer. That’s a stupid idea, I know, and sometimes I don’t forgive myself for it, because as lovely as these stones are”—glancing at her hand—“flowers are a great deal lovelier. Still these are very beautiful, aren’t they? I’m so glad mother gave them to me.”

“I’m afraid,” says Adare, slowly and with his very heart dying within him at having to say this awful thing; yet to let her wear them—this innocent girl—this girl who is all the world to him—seems, oh! not only *seems*, but *is* impossible, “that your mother had no right to give them to you.”

Her eyes now fill with surprise. There is no anger yet, only surprise.

“No right?”

“Think what you will of me,” says he, desperately, “I *must* tell you the truth. Those rings belong to the jewels that your—that Sir Lucien is looking for.”

Amber makes a little movement. It brings her nearer to him. There is terrible anger in her eyes.

“You mean?” says she.

“Let me speak to you. Explain. Why should you look at me like that? I mean that those rings——” He cannot go on.

She takes his difficulty from him.

“Oh! no, no, *no!*” cries she, eagerly, passionately,

as if with intent of staying his next words. "You are wrong, quite wrong—my mother gave them to me. They could not belong to the jewels that are lost. She gave them to me the very night before she died. Would she give them to me *then*—and to me—a child—a mere child—if they were not *honestly* her own?"

He is silent. It is perhaps the most dreadful moment of his life. How can he speak?—how reassure her?

His silence strikes to her very heart.

"You don't believe!" cries she, in a low but vehement tone. "Take them, then. *Take* them!" She pulls them from her fingers, and dashes them with a superb gesture of scorn and righteous anger and conscious innocence at his feet.

They roll round and round, but by a most marvellous chance do not reach any of the many crevices in the old and broken flooring.

"Let me speak!"

"No. Not one word! Go! Do you hear. *Go!*"

"Not till you hear me!" He stands doggedly before her. He is fighting, as he knows, for his life.

"I will not hear you. Why should I? What are you to me? A month ago"—with a cruel little smile—"I never even heard of you! I care nothing at all about you. Indeed"—throwing out her hands with a widening and increasing in the cruelty of the smile—"you are *less* than nothing to me!"

"Is that true?" says he; and then suddenly catching her hands, "I don't believe it."

"No?" she laughs aloud. Such a miserable laugh.

"What do you believe? Neither in me, nor in my father nor my mother. Not even in your uncle, Sir Lucien, who has been the cause of this last insult. Did he employ you? Did he send you here? Are you a spy?" The smile, now dreadful as her words, is still upon her lips, and she is facing him bravely, defying him, with all the courage of the good old race from which she has sprung, her small head tilted backwards, when suddenly something happens!

The small and slender frame falls a-trembling. She raises two shaking hands to her eyes, and, turning sharply aside, ashamed—crushed to the very soul that he should see her humiliation—she bursts into a passion of tears.

A silence, with nothing but that most heart-broken sobbing.

"Amber," exclaims he, hoarsely. He goes to her and ventures to touch one of those small hands, so wildly pressed against the bursting lids.

But she shrinks away from him. "Don't touch me. Don't. I could not bear it."

"Don't cry like that, then," says he, savagely. "It drives me mad. I wish to God I had never said a word about those cursed rings. Even now, if you wish it, you can keep them. No one knows of them but you and——"

"Is this *another* insult?" exclaims she. "Do you think I would have you keep back your knowledge of those rings? Do you think I *want* to keep them? I suppose my manner is ungracious, but—please

pick them up, and"—with a lightning glance at him that very *nearly* kills him—"go away."

She turns from him, scorn and anger in her whole air.

"It shall be as you will, of course," says he, "with regard to my going. But I have nothing whatever to do with those rings; they are yours so far. Sir Lucien may lay claim to them, but how does that concern me? They are his. To go from him to——"

"You," contemptuously.

He looks at her.

"Surely we are quits," says he. "That is an insult from you to me! No; by a clause in the old will the jewels, *after* your mother, were to go to Sir Lucien for ever, for him to leave to whomsoever he pleased. So you see the missing stones are less than nothing to me. Sir Lucien"—with a lifting of his brows—"is not enamoured of me."

"They are nothing to me either," says the girl, coldly. "Let us make an end of the matter. It is very distasteful to me."

She moves towards the opening in the wall.

"You mean by that"—he follows her—"that you will not accept Sir Lucien's invitation." He stops, looking at her, trying to read her face, his own very pale. "Is *this* to be the end——?"

She gives a little curt glance, half, only half, turning her head.

"You do not understand me. If I ever hesitated about accepting it, you may be sure all such hesitation is now at an end," says she, smiling at him;

but, oh! what a cold, repellent smile. "I shall go to Carrig whenever your sister chooses to ask me. I am not one bit ashamed of your finding those rings upon my fingers. "I"—with her small head thrown backwards and the brilliant light of battle in her dark blue eyes—"I defy you all!"

"Why should you speak to me like that?" says the young man, a little pale, but with a firm expression round his lips. "Is it fair? Defy Sir Lucien, if you will, but why look upon *me* as an enemy? Would you have had me act differently? Would you have had me—*knowing* those rings were not *really* yours—keep silence? Wouldn't you have *hated* me for so doing, when you knew——"

She has turned away from him so that he cannot see her face, but now she puts up a little hand as if imploring him not to go on.

"Yes, I knew it," says he. He takes the hand in his and holds it firmly. "I knew you well enough, though our friendship has been so short a one, to understand you there at least. To——"

"Yes, yes." She stops him. "I would not have anything undone. I am glad you saw them." She gives a little hurried glance at the rings. "What are you going to do with them?" asks she, faintly. There is a shrinking from them in her sad eyes, and yet a longing—a regret for them, too, that is not to be disguised. She had loved them, delighted in them. They had been her dearest possession, and now he has stepped in and has spoiled her joy in them.

"They are yours as much as mine," says he. "What will you do with them?"

"Oh, no, not mine. It is not that—only——" She covers her eyes with her hands. "Don't tell *him*!" A last faint sob escapes her. "Don't tell Sir Lucien!"

A perfect rage of misery sweeps over him.

"I feel the greatest brute alive," says he. "Do you know I would rather *die* than make you so unhappy, and yet—— *Tell* him! How could you suggest such a thing? Keep them until the others are discovered, and then——"

"Oh, no. I shall never touch them again. I could not. Could not you?" She looks at him anxiously.

"No. But suppose—suppose we hide them somewhere here." It occurs to him that burying their little secret in the old Mill will be a bond between them. "Down in that old cellar we looked into the other day. They could lie there very comfortably until—if ever—the others are found."

"Very well." She leads the way down the broken staircase to the hole in the upper flooring, where a mouldy old ladder leads to the cellar beneath.

As Adare puts his foot on the ladder, he notices one of the arrows that had attracted his attention before, cut deep into the upper step. "Here is another of those queer marks," says he. "And all pointing downwards. I wonder what it means?"

"Some direction to the mill men, no doubt."

"It is very dark. Are you afraid to come?"

"No." She descends quickly after him, reaching presently a vaulted chamber, dank and dark, and filled with a strong smell of must and earth. It is

lighted, if lighting it can be called, by a thin ray of sunshine that creeps in through a small grated opening in a side wall.

Looking round for a likely spot in which to bury them, Adare's eyes suddenly rest on a mark in the wall close to him. An arrow again, and again pointing downwards.

"How curious," says he. "Shall we bury them here? This old arrow may help us to remember them."

"I don't want to remember them," says Amber, slowly. "And to dig so near a wall——"

Oh! Amber, if you had only known.

"True, it would be harder, no doubt, and we have neither spade nor pick. Well"—moving a little farther from the wall—"here will do, and the arrow after all, can be a guide even at this distance."

With a bit of iron lying on the earthen floor, Adare digs a little hole in one of the corners close to the grated opening, and there, in his handkerchief, buries the rings. If only he had dug a little farther to the right!

"Now they belong to nobody," says he, with quite extraordinary pleading. In his heart he knows they belong to Sir Lucien, but sometimes it is impossible to be *too* honest. And that old miser can wait for these until he gets the rest. "Come up out of this dismal place."

Outside they part, but when they have gone a step or two, he stops and comes to her again.

"It is nothing," says he, uncertainly, "only, a little while ago I said our acquaintance was but a short

one. I want to take that back. I want to tell you that I feel as if I had known you for ever, and"—slowly—"and *only* you!"

Tears rise in her eyes. She gives him her hand silently. Raising his hat, he stoops and presses his lips to it. Their eyes meet. She is seeing him through a misty veil—he is seeing her as he has never seen woman before! Oh! the dear, sad, sweet little face!

He would have held her, but she shakes her head, and without a word goes swiftly from him. Her steps have turned towards her home, that bleak melancholy old house on the top of the hill. And without so much as one backward glance, she disappears from his view.

"She *might* have looked, even *once*," says he, disappointedly, when the last turn of the last corner (there are many of them, which of course adds to her cruelty in his eyes) has been passed by the all too swift feet of his beloved. "It wouldn't have been so much!"

But how could he know that the tears were running so fast down her cheeks that she dare not turn, that she does not dare even to raise her handkerchief to stay them, lest he read the action rightly and come back to her.

So he turns away and takes his road sadly homewards, not forgetting, however to call at the cabin that *she* had pointed out to him where her poor little friend had been disappointed at her non-coming and at the loss of his bread and butter too. A sovereign laid in his little bare hands squares matters some-

what, and with the poor mother's blessings on his head still ringing in his ears (she had been transported with joy, and the little lad went with his small stomach well filled for many a day afterwards) he reaches Carrig Castle in time to send a telegram to Streeter.

CHAPTER XI.

“The warp holds fast across; and every thread
That makes the woof up, has dry specks of red.
Always the shuttle cleaves clean through, and he
Weaves with the hair of many a ruined head.”

IF Adare had not seen those sad tears running down her cheeks, someone else did. A tall, dark man coming out from the shadows of the few trees that surround the Mill House quickly follows her and now is at her side.

“So that is all your new-found relation can do for you,” says Brian Deane, “to make you cry your eyes out. What have ever any of your mother’s people done for you but that? Even your *lady* mother”—with a scornful emphasis on the adjective.

“Don’t speak to me now, Brian. I want to be alone.” Her tone is heart-broken, and to this man, who in his own wild, rough way loves her as well as even Adare does (and that is saying a great deal), this gentle answer from Amber, when he has been expecting one of the usual “shutting-up” order, adds fuel to the fire of the passion that has been consuming him ever since he first met her; now it drives him to open expression of it.

“Damn him!” cries he, fiercely. “If it is his fault

that you are crying now—if he has given you one sore thought, I'll choke the life out of him."

"If you are talking of——" begins Amber.

"I am talking of that fine toff, Hilary Adare."

"If you are really talking of Captain Adare, he has had nothing to do with my crying," says she, slowly, as if thinking, as if making very sure. "No, it is life that troubles me. I'm tired of it already, Brian, and that's the fact. There's too much against me, too little for me. I can't find a balance anywhere. You see"—smiling dismally—"I don't ask for much—not for an overweight on my side—only for a balance. But there are so many things against me."

"A strong thing for you is better than a few weak things against you," says he, gruffly. Then, after a pause, "*I'm* for you!" He has plainly great faith in his own powers.

"Yes, I know"—indifferently—"I know. You are always very kind."

"Kind! It isn't that," says he, swinging round to her. "It is you who might be kind, for the matter of that. And I tell you what"—his face whitening, his mouth twitching—"I'd be content with your kindness. I would, by ——. As for me, I"—he stops as if suffocating, and then bursts out—"I don't care a devil damn; I'll tell you the truth, now, straight here. I worship the very ground you walk on. I'd sell my soul for you—I——"

"Stand there!" Her voice rings out clear and calm.

He had made a movement towards her, but now

checks himself as if paralysed. Her exquisite head is thrown back, her eyes are fixed on his. There is no thought of fear in all her slight and beautiful body. "What do you mean," says she, "by speaking to me like this? It is absurd. I do not wish for your love."

"Is that"—he frowns heavily—"because you desire his?"

"His? Captain Adare's, you mean?" She speaks clearly still, though her lips whiten a little. "He is nothing to me."

"You"—eagerly—"are still free then? If—if I"—looking round him and sinking his voice—"if I could clear your father's memory"—Amber, who has turned away, now suddenly looks back at him, her eyes lighting—"if I could say where those lost jewels are——"

"Brian!"—she has laid her hand upon his arm—"You know. You know. Oh! say—*say* that you know."

"I *can* know, if you will make it worth my while," says he, with a cold sort of laugh. "You know what I mean. See here, my girl, if I tell you where the stones are—if I clear your father's memory—for that I know is what you are up to—will you marry me? Come now. A bargain—is it a bargain?"

There is a dead pause. To clear her father's memory.

The father who had been so dear to her in her early life—the father who had been kind to her to the end, whose memory now is the only thing on earth she has to reverence, to love——

She hesitates here. Her breath grows quicker. Is that memory to her father all that indeed now she has to love? This sudden intruding of a new thought upon the old one checks her, and finally steadies her. The father who had loved her in the old days, before time and grief had deadened his senses, would wish her above everything to be happy, to be free!

She turns to Deane.

"No. Not even for that." As she says it she turns away from him, and steps out quickly towards the house. A slight turn brings her within view of it—and safety; the few servants there are devoted to her.

"This is that hound's doing," says he, in a low but vehement tone. "Say what you will, you love him; but you'll never marry him; mark my words, girl; *never!* I'll back myself and that old devil, Sir Lucien, to prevent it. And"—calling after her—"you need not be in such a violent hurry. I am going indoors too."

* * * * *

Straight to his sister's sitting-room he goes. Esther Deane, small, fragile, a bare fragment of a woman, with pale blue eyes sunk in a face almost emaciated, looks up from the eternal patchwork she is always employed on, to greet him. His entrance has changed the entire expression of her face. Through the sullen dulness that usually characterises it, a gleam of honest joy now shows. On this brother, the sole relation she has ever known (her father and mother having died when she was fifteen, and Brian a mere infant), she has lavished all the small stock

of love that even the coldest creature must contain in his or her breast.

"What is it?" asks she, looking up at him over her shoulder. The love she bears him, the love of a mother for a son—for indeed the difference in their ages gives her a sort of motherly care for him—does not allow her to break through the terrible calm that has been hers all her life.

"I want to talk to you," says he, "about—those jewels."

"*What!*" She starts to her feet. "You have found them?"

"Not exactly," slowly. "I have made a discovery, however."

"My letter to you enclosing those papers were of use then?"

"Yes." He draws in a little. "At least——"

"I knew it," interrupts she, triumphantly. "When I went over the old man's papers and saw those strange scribblings with the arrows on them and then noted his words, I felt there was something in them—something that *you* ought to know."

"It was very sharp of you," says he. It has occurred to him that it will be well to humour her, though as a fact she is no longer of any use to him except in *one* particular; and that—yes, the girl—the girl he *will* have; though jewels and sister (and to say the truth he is fond of the latter in his queer way) and all the world were to be lost, he would still fight for the girl.

"I have made a discovery—of a *sort*. I *think* I know where that old idiot hid the stones."

"But are you sure? How can you be sure? The old man was not himself after his wife's death. He spoke strangely at times. Only to the girl—to Amber—was he the same as he used to be. I noticed how he failed hour by hour after the death of that *cruel* wife of his. But she—Amber—never saw it, I think. He had something on his mind certainly. And I always connected it with his wife—and the jewels. That was why on her death and *their* disappearance I first wrote to you. But don't make too sure. He was not *quite* sane, I think. Where do you think they are?"

"You would make a splendid detective," says he, avoiding her last question. "I fancy—fancy *only*, mind—that I am on the verge of finding what will make us all——" He stops abruptly. "Look here, Esther, the give and take system is the honestest all round—the one I hang on to. Come! I'll make a proposition to you. If you will help me to marry Amber, I'll take you and Amber and"—with a short laugh—"the jewels to Australia. Come! What of that, eh? It is a bargain!"

Esther is silent. She turns again to her writing-table and thus conceals the terrible change that has come over her face. He *loves* that girl! Amber! He loves Amber! All her—Esther's—love for him, all her care, all the eager desire for his welfare that has led her (through these jewels) almost to the verge of crime, is now to be cast aside, forgotten, because of that girl's eyes, or hair, or smile.

She could have cried aloud, but still the repression of years is on her, and she sits silent, quite

straight, with no weak bending of the back, apparently looking over the intolerable rows of figures lying on the desk before her.

To the sister who adores him it seems impossible that any woman could refuse him. He will marry her, and they will go to Australia, and (she believes in him so far, and justly, too) they will take her with them. But there as here, from this day forth, she will have to play second fiddle—to consent to sit in the background, to give up all claim to the man to whom as a boy she had been almost a mother. The shock, so sudden, so bitter, almost undoes her, in spite of the stoical calm that belongs to her.

“Well,” says he, gruffly, having waited quite a long time for her answer, “can’t you speak? Didn’t you hear? It’s an offer, by Jove, that you ought to snap at!”

“Well, so I do,” says she at last, with a strange laugh. Laughter is so unusual a thing with her at any time that he stares at her for a moment, then lounges out of the room.

CHAPTER XII.

“There’s a time to be jolly, a time to repent,
A season for folly, a season for Lent.”

“DEAR Owen, do put down that whip. I’m sure you’ll never stop until the ponies run away,” says May, in a little agony of fright. In a rash moment she had consented to Mr. McGrath’s proposal to drive her over to the mill house behind the sprightly little ponies “Sam” and “Sabina,” there to give Amber Sir Lucien’s invitation—gruffly worded by him—very politely to be worded by May—to spend a week at Carrig Castle. “*Do* stop teasing those poor little things and let us talk about Amber.”

“They love it,” says Owen, genially.

“Well, I don’t.”

“Don’t like teasing? What a funny girl.”

“I was talking about your whip,” says she, with dignity.

“Well, what’s the matter with it?” regarding it critically. “Very nice whip I call it. I suppose you think the handle ought to be set with sapphires? I’ll see about that when we get home.”

“If we ever do,” scornfully.

“We shall—with the help of this despised whip. Do you know its name?”

"Oh, don't be more stupid than you can help, Owen." This with distinct impatience. She wants to talk of the coming interview with Amber, and Amber's supposed guardian, Miss Deane. "Whips don't have names."

"*Mine* do," mildly but firmly. "*This* one is called Money. I christened it myself yesterday, after waiting a considerable time for the bishop, who didn't turn up. Good name, eh?"

"I can't say I see it," stiffly.

"No?" He smiles admiringly at her. "That's because you are so clever. Clever people never see anything. Ever heard of the old saying, 'Money makes the mare go?' Now just watch Sabina." Here he gives the off pony a delicate flip between the ears, whereon she nearly kicks over the traces. "See?"—triumphantly—"my 'Money' has made *this* 'mare' go."

Sabina indeed is now tearing along the road, with Sam beside her, at quite a runaway pace.

"Oh, stop them! Oh, what a horrid boy you are," cries May, nearly in tears.

"It's all right. There's a hill before us; sit tight!" cries McGrath, who is now in his element and is singing at the top of his wonderful lungs, to the tune of "Honey, my Honey," "Oh, Money! *my* Money! If the reins will only last!"—which is really a very disgraceful travesty on such a delightful and popular song.

They do last fortunately until the stiff ascent before them brings Sam and Sabina to their senses once more.

"I shall certainly *never* go driving with you again," says May, indignantly. "And if you think you are clever you make a huge mistake. I never heard such a stupid name for anything since I was born. Really, Owen, I have often thought that there is something wrong with your brain."

"You may be sure of it," agrees he, cheerfully, "or else I should not be going to-day with you on this wild-goose chase."

"Amber"—disdainfully—"will be flattered when she hears you called her a goose!"

"A *wild* one!" carefully. "Don't forget the wild. Girls love to be called wild."

"Girls—like——" Words fail her.

"Yes," nodding knowingly, "it makes them feel like boys!"

"All this only shows," says she, with a dignified tilt of her little chin, "how very little you know about them."

"Boys?"

"Girls!"

"Well, come now," says Mr. McGrath, putting on a magisterial air. "On your honour, would you rather be called a wild goose or a tame one?"

"I refuse"—haughtily—"to be called a goose at all!"

"Oh, there you are," says he, aggrieved. "Women never can argue. Is that the turn to the mill? I say, May, I wonder if they'll let her come?"

"Amber? I don't know." All unpleasantnesses are at once sunk in the delight of this absorbing thought. "Do you know, Owen, I feel a little, just

a *little* nervous, don't you know; Miss Deane looks—eh? What do *you* think?—just a——”

“Regular Tartar,” supplements he.

“Oh!” in rather a faint voice. “Not so bad as that perhaps; but still—you'll back me up, Owen, won't you? you'll—*tackle* her, that's your word—you *will* tackle her if she is—is—rude or anything?”

“I'll do my best; but”—gloomily—“the way is dark before me. I *have* heard,” with a touch of recovering courage, “that if you sit on their heads they don't kick. Shall I sit on her head?”

“Of course, if you are going to make a jest of it——”

“What do you take me for—to jest at a moment like this? However, before I put my name to it, one word! Does Miss Amber resemble auntie?”

“Miss Deane is not her aunt—only a cousin. I *wish* you would try and get that into your head before we arrive. Amber like Miss Deane! Why Amber is lovely! perfectly lovely! She is the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life.”

“And yet,” says Mr. McGrath, thoughtfully, “I suppose—I don't know, of course—but I suppose you have a looking-glass?”

At this she laughs.

“If she *is* so lovely, we had better be getting on,” says Owen; and now commences a series of flicks at the heads of both Sam and Sabina, calculated to make any well brought up ponies furious in a minute or so.

“I *wish* you wouldn't, Owen! You only irritate them. What on earth”—marking afresh the delicate

little dabs he is making at one of the ponies' ears with the lash of the whip—"are you doing?" She speaks angrily, the pony's gymnastics under his treatment having got on her nerves.

"Fly-fishing!" says Mr. McGrath, equably; "see 'em on Sam's ear?"

"There is not a fly anywhere." And indeed there isn't; October disagrees with flies.

"Don't like that version," says Owen, who is a born tease. "I'll give you another. I'm full of resource. But I'm full of principle, too. I stick to my first word. Fishing I *am*! If you object to the winged insect, I'll give you another show. I'm"—suiting the action to the word and bringing down the barest point of the lash on one of the ponies' ears—"trying to get a rise out of Sam!"

And a "rise" he gets. Once again the ponies start off wildly, and once again a merciful hill—Ireland is full of mercies of that sort—stops them.

"This is the last time you see me driving with you," cries May, when the pace, having slackened a little, permits her to speak. "No more fly-fishing for *me*, thank you! I suppose that is a joke, too?"

"See it?" says he, delightedly. "'Pon my word, you'd guess anything! And why won't you come driving with me again? I'm about the best man at that sort of thing you're likely to find. *Twice* to-day we have been run away with by infuriated animals and not one broken bone between us."

"No thanks to *you*," indignantly. "Next time I shall ask Gilbert to drive me."

"Grey! Doesn't know a horse from a cow." He

turns aside as he says this to hide the grin he can't suppress. He is quite aware of the little *tendresse* that exists between May and Gilbert.

"Really, Owen"—hotly—"it is absurd your talking like that. Why yesterday, when you and Hilary and Gilbert and Mr. Everard had that little steeple-chase over the fields below, Gilbert was the first in. Gilbert *won!*"

"Didn't you know," says he, dropping his voice to a very confidential one, and leaning towards her, "he was strapped on?"

After this, conversation came to an abrupt and painful end.

* * * * *

The interview with Miss Deane is gone through without so great a hitch as May had anticipated. Miss Deane, indeed, had shown herself not only compliant, but actually anxious that Amber should go and spend a week with her uncle.

Esther had heard of Hilary Adare, of his meeting with Amber, both at the mill one day, and at Madam's later on, and had drawn certain conclusions. If—her heart beat fast as she dwelt on it—if Captain Adare should fall in love with the girl, and she with him—and it *might* be, for after all Brian had not let the girl see how much he loves her—well, *there* would lie a solution of the trouble that is worrying her. Amber once married or even entangled with Adare (her heart is bad to its core), Brian will be hers again to influence—to hold—to *live* for! And she has so little to live for, so little to make life sweet!

That Brian can greatly *care*! She has gone into this and has come out of it with the settled belief that he is incapable of caring much for anything—except himself. In this she wrongs him.

So Amber, who had met May's very charming advances with a shy pleasure and Mr. McGrath's all too genial advances with a touch of reserve, promises to go over to Carrig on Tuesday next—to-day is Friday—and spend a week with her cousins.

"We are all of us your cousins, you know. All of us," says May, pressing her hand at parting.

"Yes, *all* of us," repeats Mr. McGrath, with emphasis.

"And come early, come in time for tea," says May, glancing up at Amber from the pony-carriage in which she is now again seated. "Or perhaps—luncheon."

"Or breakfast," suggests Mr. McGrath, most hospitably. May gives him a withering glance.

"I shall come as soon as I can," says Amber, softly.

"We shall be looking out for you, nods May, brightly. "Good-bye! Good-bye, Miss Deane!" to Esther, who is also standing up above on the hall door steps. "So good of you to spare Amber for a few days."

The ponies dash away down the grass-grown old avenue, as if wild with a desire to be gone; and, as they disappear, Esther Deane touches Amber's arm.

"Not a word of this to—to anyone," says she.

Amber looks at her anxiously.

"You mean——?"

"I mean that if you say a word to anyone, you won't be able to go."

"I am my own mistress," says the girl, proudly. Yet for all that she takes the lesson to heart, and it is not until she is well on her way to Carrig Castle on the following Tuesday that Brian learns of the invitation, the visit of May, and the going of Amber!

* * * * *

On that afternoon, after an unsuccessful search for Amber round the grounds and in the old mill, he enters his sister's private room.

"Where is Amber?" asks he, quickly. There is no suspicion in his tone.

Miss Deane rises. The worst is before her now, and she faces it steadily.

"She has gone to spend a week with her uncle, Sir Lucien Adare!"

"What?"

The man's face grows ashy as he looks back at her. Nay, it grows dangerous.

"I thought," says she, coldly, quietly, though her heart is beginning to die within her, "that it would be well for her to know something of her mother's people."

"You thought that for *her*. What did you think for *me*? You"—he comes closer to her—"you heard what I said the other day. You knew what I meant. I did not even hide from you that I loved her, and yet——"

He stops for a moment.

"When did she get this invitation?"

"Last Friday!" She answers him clearly, and

still her eyes are fixed on his. And still she stands straight and firm before him without a shadow of outward fear.

“And this is Tuesday.” His face grows terrible now. “For four days you kept this secret. For four days you knew she was going to stay in the house with Hilary Adare, the man who you think loves her—and yet——” He makes a sudden, swift, backward movement of his arm.

“Take that, you damned traitor,” says he, dashing her in his blind fury to the ground.

* * * * *

The room is almost dark when she comes to herself again. Dragging herself to her feet by the aid of a chair near her, she stands, tottering a little, trying to bring back her senses whilst wiping, vaguely, the blood from her mouth.

Then all too suddenly it comes back to her—the scene with him, the cowardly blow.

“He didn’t mean it,” breathes she through her poor, swollen lips. “He was always hot-tempered, poor boy! He is sorry now, I know. He—did not mean it.”

Even in this woman—hard, cruel, unprincipled—the touch of the divine dwells! Love! And the desire to pardon. “Forgive them that despitefully use you.” No. He had not meant it!

CHAPTER XIII.

“O Love, thou knowest if she were good to see!”

AMBER, following the footman across the great stone hall to the drawing-room, is conscious that her heart is sinking within her. Why had she not told May the exact hour she would drive over? then she would have been met by someone, by—at all events by May.

As she approaches the door strange sounds—strange and not altogether lovely—salute her ears. Indeed, the entire house party at Carrig is engaged at this moment in singing plantation songs to the terrible accompaniment of Mr. McGrath's banjo. He had nobly volunteered to guide them through their mazes, and with such *bonhomie* that no one had the heart to bundle him out of the window. Besides, they knew they could shout him down, for *they* are many, and he and his banjo are but two. They are all singing at the top of their lungs. Not a single member of the family but has a voice of some sort or other, not a single member but is now using it with all his might. The result is amazing.

“Oh! for the ring-tailed coon,”

rings through the room as Amber enters it. But so delighted are they all with their several perform-

ances that for a full minute no one sees her or hears her. It is by a mere chance, indeed, that at the end of that time, Dolly Clarence, giving her head a shake with the view to bringing out an extra fine note, happens so to turn herself that her eyes light on the new arrival.

"Oh! my goodness!" exclaims she, but it would have taken the report of a cannon to be heard above the tumult caused by the ring-tailed coon, and so she proceeds to give Everard's arm a strong, agitated pull.

"*She's come!*" shrieks she, valiantly, and at this Everard turns sharply round, the rest follow suit, and an awful silence falls upon the uproar of a moment ago—a silence only broken by the persistent "tum—tum—tum" of Mr. McGrath's banjo.

May has run quickly up to Amber, followed in a hurried fashion by Hilary. Good heavens! what did May mean by saying that as she hadn't come to luncheon, she would probably not be here till five or so. It is almost impossible for the first moment to go by without a little awkwardness, the situation being beyond May and her brother, who feel themselves the greatest delinquents. *They really should* have been in readiness to receive her! As for Hilary, holding Amber's hand and looking into her charming face, he feels so miserably ashamed of himself that the words of welcome he would have uttered desert him altogether. Oh! confound that fellow and his eternal banjo!

Mrs. Clarence has given way to mirth.

"What an unfortunate prelude to our acquaint-

ance," she is whispering to Everard. "She'll think it was got up in her honour. A little impromptu concert! But to call her a ring-tailed coon!"

Everard is hardly listening; his eyes are fixed on the girl still standing near the doorway.

"It was too bad of us," May is murmuring to Amber, her embarrassment now wearing off. "You must think us so rude not to—but we hardly knew what time to expect you."

"We hoped you would come to luncheon," says Hilary.

"Yes, we hoped for you as soon as possible," says May, prettily. She lifts two dainty little hands to Amber's shoulders, and kisses her gently, lightly—a butterfly caress—on both cheeks.

Amber returns the two small embraces a little nervously. She flushes and looks shyly round her. This coming for the first time to the home of her mother is a great ordeal. This home in which she has so long been tabooed.

Suddenly her eyes met Hilary's.

"Come and be introduced to your other cousins," says he, and involuntarily, in spite of the many eyes looking on, he holds out his hand to her again, and again she lays hers within it. But now how differently. Fear has caught her; her fingers tighten over his in a nervous, frightened, clinging way, and with such utter unconsciousness, as goes to his heart's core.

He responds warmly to the pressure of the little fingers and his honest grasp gives strength and support to the frightened Amber. Here is a friend who

can carry her through all her embarrassments! All at once her courage rises, and with it her spirits too.

Mrs. Clarence has come forward and made friends with her in a very charming fashion. It has occurred to Mrs. Clarence that she may be useful. Colonel Clarence is coming home within six months anyway, and to get rid of Everard before that auspicious occasion seems a good thing in her eyes. She had not failed to notice Everard's intent glance at the girl as she came in. Everard is always intently glancing at some girl or other, and then—coming back to *her*; six months is a short time. She had better shunt him finally over this “new girl,” so as to have him off the grounds before the colonel puts in his next most undesirable appearance.

“We were singing,” says Dolly, “as you came in. I *hope* it sounded like that.”

“But—go on, Dolly!” says Mr. McGrath, making signs to his sister and frowning at her anxiously. “What we really wish to say, Miss O’Connell, is, that—— Go on, Dolly!”

“I really shan’t,” says Mrs. Clarence, laughing. “It’s sometimes bad enough what you propose to say yourself, but what you want *me* to say is beyond me. You must not mind my brother, Amber. May I call you Amber? He is not responsible *always* for his actions.”

“I merely,” says Mr. McGrath, with dignity, “wished to tell Miss O’Connell that you did not mean to call *her* a coo——”

He is rapidly hustled out of sight. But Amber, who has a deep sense of humour, recognizing the

meaning of it all, laughs outright, that sweet and happy laugh of hers.

So is the ice broken.

"I like that song," says she; "I know it."

"Oh, *do* you?" cries May. "We must have it again some other time. And after all it was in a sense appropriate (the singing of it, I mean, as you came in), because we were all longing to see you, and the words—you know the ridiculous thing."

"What *is* a coon?" asks Mrs. Clarence, with apparent earnest inquiry. As a fact, she does not know.

"Yes, what?" asks May, who doesn't know either, but hopes it may prove a tropical bird of many feathers.

There is a little pause, then——

"A monkey, I *think*," says Amber. She lifts her eyes, *such* eyes, and now so shyly mirthful that all at once the room is filled with laughter, and she feels instinctively that she has made every man in it her friend for life. And even the women, too, which is far more surprising.

Two men, however, are already more than mere friends. Hilary we know of. But Everard? It is noticeable—to Mrs. Clarence *certainly* later on—that from the time Amber entered until she left the room to change her gown for dinner he had never addressed her one word. That—according to Mrs. Clarence, who knows him if anyone does—speaks volumes. He had been contented to merely sit and look at her.

Even as they laugh the door again opens to admit someone. Someone who puts an end to the laugh

instantly. In a word, Sir Lucien. It is so unlike him to approach his guests at this hour, at indeed *any* hour when he can decently elude them, that even Mrs. Clarence, who is equal to most things, stares as if a first-class, highly up-to-date spook stands before her.

He advances up the room to where Amber is sitting near May, careless of the queer little silence that has followed on his entrance. Everard and Hilary make a pretence at conversation, making vigorous efforts to get Mr. McGrath to join them in this attempt, but Owen scorns at keeping up appearances; he even frowns and winks. He waves them off, as it were. He is indeed consumed with a fearful joy—an undisguised curiosity as to what the entrance of his host at this moment may mean.

The tall, grim old man, lean and cruel-faced, but singularly handsome, has now reached Amber's side. He had taken no notice whatever of anyone else in the room as he walked up—and, standing motionless, looks down at the girl.

"You are my niece"—he pauses. The pause is insulting—"I am told."

Hilary makes a movement as if to go to her, but Mrs. Clarence lays her hand upon his arm. She is very clever.

Amber rises slowly to her feet. Her face is always so clearly white that the little additional pallor that now grows upon it is not sufficient to raise joy in the breast of the one who is bent on embarrassing her.

"I really don't know," says Amber, in slow, even

tones (where is her nervousness of a moment ago?). "You are my uncle—I am *told!*"—the pause is identical—"but how can I be sure?"

A dead silence, whilst these two, the young girl and the old man, face each other resolutely. The affected conversation between Everard and Hilary has long ago fallen to the ground. May is looking a little faint. Mr. McGrath by his sister's efforts *alone* is prevented from giving a loud and tremendous clap for Amber. "By George, she scored!" he said in the smoking-room afterwards. "She regularly diddled that old miscreant!"

A slow red flush has risen to Sir Lucien's cheeks. His frown deepens, but his eyes waver. They fall.

"True, we have not met until now." This is a distinct come down. "I hear, however, that though you have not met me, you have met some of my guests."

"She has met some of her *cousins*," says Hilary, walking straight up to her.

"Ah, so!" Sir Lucien gives him a keen glance. "Yes, of course, her cousins. I have also"—turning deliberately to her—"had the pleasure"—with a sneer—"of meeting some of *your* cousins. Mr. Deane, for example. I suppose I am too new a friend"—with a curl of the lip—"to congratulate you?"

Amber raises her large dark eyes to his. Her face has grown rigid—haughty. At this moment the strange, the almost extraordinary likeness between them is so plain that it strikes everyone in the room.

"I do not understand you!"

"No? Have I been indiscreet? Mr. Deane, however, informed me to-day that he is desirous of marriage with you. That in effect the marriage is arranged. I was glad to hear of it. A most excellent arrangement in my opinion. He is, I understand, very well to do in Australia."

He smiles languidly and glances at Hilary, who is gazing at Amber with compressed lips and dilated nostrils. *A lie! A lie! Why* can't she speak?

"Brian may be well to do or the reverse, for all I know," says she at last, very quietly, absolutely indifferently indeed, "it is nothing to me. If he were the richest man on earth, I should not marry him; and I certainly am not engaged to him."

"And I really think," breaks in May, with gentle indignation, "that to speak like this to Amber just on her arrival——" She looks helplessly at Dolly.

"Barbarous!" says Mrs. Clarence, promptly.

"I see I have been a little premature," says Sir Lucien, smiling. He is abominable when he smiles. "Young ladies do not like having their little sentimental secrets wrested from them before the *time*. But I still hope"—shaking his long white hand before Amber's face and taking on quite a jocund air—"that presently—presently—when things are a little more forward, you will take me into your confidence."

He turns away, picks up the *Irish Times* from the table near him, and strolls through the window on to the balcony and so to the gardens below.

"Don't mind him," says May, eagerly, throwing her arm round Amber's neck. "He's a—yes, he is,

Hilary. I don't care—you are always scolding me for saying it—but"—to Amber—"he is a pig."

"I don't know what the good old swine have done to deserve this," puts in Mr. McGrath, plaintively. "They *may* wallow in the kindly mire, but they never make sarcastic remarks, and when dead they are very good to eat. Now our dear uncle, when dead (I don't think myself it will ever come off, there is too much enthusiasm about it)—but if he *should* be so considerate as to——"

"Oh, stop, Owen! You know you ought not to speak like that, it's perfectly horrid," says May. "What I want to tell Amber is that he's dreadful—perfectly dreadful—and that she must only make up her mind to him; we all do."

Amber has sunk down into the chair in which she was sitting before Sir Lucien came. There is some lassitude in her air.

"He has frightened you," says Mrs. Clarence, very kindly. Her kindness is extraordinary, as she very seldom goes out of her way to help anyone.

"Oh, no," says Amber, lifting her charming chin so that they can all see the delightful smile that gives extra beauty to a face that hardly needs it, "I am not afraid of him; I"—very softly—"am not afraid of *anyone*." Hilary, who is beside her, wonders if she means Deane by that very emphatic "*anyone*."

CHAPTER XIV.

“Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing more than any man in all Venice.”

DINNER goes off very well considering all things, chiefly perhaps because of the fact that Sir Lucien seems too preoccupied with his thoughts, whatever they may be about, to give him leisure to act the skeleton at the feast, or to spread broadcast among them, as is his charming wont, such flowers of cruel satire, such touches of open venom as flow so easily from his bitter tongue.

He had come back fresh from a last interview with Deane, to meet Amber in his drawing-room. This interview had been momentous, and during it Deane had made the strangest proposal. So strange that even now Sir Lucien trifles with the courses before him rather than partakes of them.

Up to to-day Deane had defied Sir Lucien, had refused to give any information about the missing jewels, had indeed strenuously denied all knowledge of them, but in so sneering, so insulting a fashion as to make Sir Lucien, who has a good deal of brain, still believe that he has some information in his possession that, should he get at it, would enable Sir Lucien to lay his hand on them should the fellow choose to speak.

Up to this "the fellow" had been obdurate.

Sir Lucien had gone far before to-day. He had actually offered a bribe to Deane. But the storm of rage that followed upon that proposal prevented him from ever making another. He had even begun to believe in the man's ignorance, when to-day opened his eyes.

To-day the most marvellous thing had occurred. Deane, instead of sneeringly rejecting the idea of ever having seen or heard of the missing gems, had confessed stolidly, openly, that he could tell where they were, if—he had paused there, and struck his foot fiercely against the ground—if Sir Lucien made it worth his while.

Then Sir Lucien said something that the other had brushed away with a smile.

Oh! yes, of course, he, Sir Lucien, might drag him to the judgment-seat—might consign him to prison and—he laughed loudly—the torture—but he should never betray the secret he held unless——

There was a condition.

The condition was Amber. The girl was held up between the two men to be bought and sold.

Amber once his wife—five minutes after the ceremony—the jewels should lie in Sir Lucien's hands.

Sir Lucien had come home intoxicated with this hideous bargain. The girl *should* be sold. What was *she* in comparison with those priceless gems that meant a fresh fortune to his house. His brain was on fire as he sat down to dinner. To marry the girl to Deane! Why it was a most simple thing! To marry her into her own low set, as he called it.

A whisper, a mere breath of Hilary's admiration for Amber had come to him; chiefly through Deane, who had not, however, spoken freely for many reasons—but he has elected to fling all such silly suspicions aside. Of course they were the outcome of a foolish man's jealousy. He had directed all his attention to Hilary's demeanour towards her during dinner, but beyond that one impulsive step he had taken in the drawing-room he saw nothing that would point to attachment of any sort. If there had been anything, which he doubted, it was a mere young man's fancy, bound to go—a mere midsummer madness, nothing more—nothing more. And the girl *shall* marry Deane.

Hilary's demeanour indeed dispels all fears. He grows calmer as he looks at him. He has been watching him closely. Hilary is not sitting beside Amber, and hardly looks at her. Sir Lucien takes special notice of this point.

And it is true, too. Hilary does *not* look at Amber, nor does she look at him. Yet there is something about Adare—a touch of sudden gaiety—of unsuspected happiness—a certain buoyancy in his whole air that must strike forcibly upon an acute observer.

Sir Lucien, usually too keen, is now, however, so wrapped up in his dreams of a lost treasure restored that he fails to note these subtle touches of gaiety in his nephew. He is content with the certainty that Adare is sitting far from the girl and seems very indifferent to her.

And no wonder! he tells himself, with his cynical

old smile, his glance resting for a moment with open hatred upon Amber.

As a fact, poor child (there is no denying it), she is very badly gowned. Her frock is old and ill fitting. There is not the smallest touch of fashion about it. And yet . . . anyone else in the world, perhaps, would have looked dowdy in it, but nature has come to Amber's rescue. The gown may be badly cut, but the delicate whiteness of the neck and arms that show through it, the pose of the flower-like head and the dainty shell-pink ears sitting so closely to it, the starry brightness of the soft and lovely eyes—all conquer with a mighty hand the sins of that cruel gown. And there is, too, such a bizarrerie about her—such a charming touch of naturalness—an air of sweet friendliness towards all around her, that the men prostrate themselves in a body before her, and even the women cease to feel faint as they regard that awful toilette.

Even Gilbert Gray, who is so far a slave to his passion for pretty May as to regard most women save her as almost hideous, gives in to Amber's happy smile, and goes such dreadful lengths as to say in confidence to Mr. McGrath that she was "better than most of 'em."

He is indeed so attentive to her in little ways that May grows first surprised, then angry, and finally very cold to him—an awful deed that drives him to the verge of desperation. Good heavens! what has he done *now*? The "now" is eloquent of the capriciousness of his heart's desire.

"Done *now*!" quotes Mr. McGrath, to whom in a

weak moment he has made this appeal, "as if you didn't know."

"How can I know? *What* can I know? Take that stupid grin off your face, for goodness' sake."

"Oh, go 'way!" says Owen, who is in his element, giving him a dig in the ribs that Mr. Grey resents openly and furiously. "Go 'way for a larky chap! *I* saw you!"

"Saw what? confound you!"

"Oh, come now, Grey—what's the good of pretending? If you *will* flirt outrageously, you know, with one charming girl under another charming girl's nose, well, you've got to look out for fireworks, you know. Eh?"

"I believe it's all your doing," says Grey, indignantly. "Did you tell her what I said to you about Miss O'Connell?"

"What do you take me for?" asks Owen, sadly. "Grey, my real character is still an unknown land to you. You *ought* to explore it. Do you think that for one moment I would be guilty of laying bare to May the sacred secret you committed to my care?"

"Sacred secret!" Grey stares at him as if hardly believing his ears. "I said Miss O'Connell wasn't half bad, or something like that."

"I hope it *wasn't* something like that," says Mr. McGrath, very seriously. "If it *was*—half *bad*!—when Miss O'Connell hears that, though of course I hope she *won't*—however, nothing is certain, and as you persist in saying May heard what you said to *me* just now—which proves that walls have ears——"

"Oh, rot!" says Mr. Grey, breaking rudely in upon his eloquence.

"I don't know. I'm not so sure. Anyway, when Miss O'Connell *does* hear that you called her only *half* bad, there will be a row, don't you think? And a row with two women, Grey! As a rule, a quarrel with *one* is quite two much for *me*. But"—regretfully—"I'm only a little one!"

"You're the biggest ass I know," says Grey. He turns on his heel, leaving Mr. McGrath a prey to many merry thoughts.

* * * * *

Upstairs now, in Dolly's bedroom, another small controversy is raging. May, clad in a pale pink dressing-gown trimmed elaborately with falling lace, had come a quarter of an hour ago into Mrs. Clarence's room. It had taken her that fifteen minutes to arrive at what she had *come* to say.

"What do you think of her?" asks she at last, desperately at heart, but *very* quietly outwardly.

"'Half sly, half shy,'" quotes Mrs. Clarence, who is trying how her hair would look if she put it up a little farther back upon her head. She has dismissed her maid, who had left it in a long plait, and who would have been very much surprised to see it as it is now. "Look here, May, how d'ye think this would suit me?"

"Not a bit," says May. "Your forehead is too high. But, Dolly, she isn't *sly*, I think—I hope."

"You're right, my forehead *is* too high," says Mrs. Clarence, still gazing into the looking-glass. "A high forehead shows genius, they say, but it's beastly

unbecoming. What are you saying about Amber? Sly? Did you say sly?"

"It was *you* who said it; but she isn't, is she, Dolly?" May is almost tearful. "She isn't an underhand sort of person. Dolly, don't say she is that."

"I shan't, indeed. Look here, May. She's a girl after my own heart. The way she tackled that old fiend this evening—you remember?—has made me her slave for ever. I should have said 'brave,' not 'sly,' but you know, May darling, you never see a quotation. She is a 'splendid cousin'—see *that* quotation?—no, of course. Well, you *can* see anyway that I admire her."

"So does everyone else, it seems," says May, disconsolately, tapping her small foot upon the floor.

Mrs. Clarence laughs.

"Even the devoted Gilbert!" She says this with an audacious grimace. "And so you are jealous then? *I'm* not!"

"Jealous!" with an angry flush. "Nonsense! What have I to be jealous about? And as for you"—naïvely—"how could you be jealous? You're married."

"Unfortunately!" says Mrs. Clarence, amiably. "But even married people—it may surprise you, my dear May—but even those unlucky wretches sometimes have what old maids call 'followers.' Eustace has been my 'follower' for a considerable time." On this, seeing May's horrified face, she falls back in her chair and goes into small shrieks of laughter. "No," gasps she at last, catching hold of the girl's gown.

"No, you can stay with safety. Nothing naughty, I assure you. You need not sink into the ground just yet. What I meant to say when I began was, that even when married one doesn't, as a rule, relish the idea of one's best boys being carried off by an alien, at a moment's notice. However, to tell you the truth, *I'm* the exception to that rule!"

"You mean," says May, a little vaguely. She is thinking that she *isn't* an exception.

"I mean that Eustace is becoming rather a white elephant, especially now that Frederic—worse luck—is expected home in February. Besides, even if Frederic"—her husband—"should stay for ever at the antipodes, Eustace is growing to be a bore. The fact is, I'm tired of him, and so, d'ye see, I'm rather glad that he has fallen in love with this new strange Amber of ours."

"I never could understand," says May, looking at her, "how you ever consented to marry Major Clarence."

"Could you not? I always could. He was rich, I was poor. He was a beast, I was *I*. That squared all *that*! I make no conceited remarks, you notice. He must come in for the title if he lives (which I'm afraid he will), and I love a title. And besides, since he woke to the idea that he no longer fancied me—a tremendous mercy—I feel that life is well worth living, in spite of the uncomfortable fact that I still bear his name."

"I'd hate to bear his name."

"You're young," says Dolly. "I want to bear his name till he is Lord Adamant; I'm dying to be

a countess. After that he may depart this life as soon as he likes. Only I know he *won't* like. He's a perfect burr. But you can see, May, that I don't want complications when he comes home, so that I'm delighted that Eustace has taken a fancy to her."

"I see," slowly. And then, "She is very pretty."

"Tut, you little silly," says Mrs. Clarence, laughing. "Do you think Gilbert is in love with her? Not he! He is so far gone in the Slough of Despond with regard to *you* that I think he will be drowned if you will not give him a helping hand. Give it, May, and land him on safe and dry ground!"

"Oh, I don't know what you are talking about!" says the girl, with suddenly flushed cheeks, but she kisses Dolly with extra warmth as they part for the night."

CHAPTER XV.

“You have too much respect upon the world.”

It is three days later. Three days of brilliant sunshine—of ever-increasing happiness for Amber. Like a flower planted in the shade, pining always for the light beyond that brought suddenly into the full soft warmth and glory of the sun's hot rays, lifts its head to heaven, and drinking in rapturously the sweetness of the open day, expands into a more perfect beauty, so Amber, whose young days have been spent for the most part in gloom and melancholy, now blossoms into greater brilliance, and for the first time *knows* herself. Her pretty, low, soft laugh rings clear and sound; her lovely eyes are filled with light. She has even acquired a faint touch of innocent coquetry that sits most charmingly upon her.

She has been initiated into the mysteries of tennis, has shown a truly wonderful aptitude for croquet—though when first she came she had known nothing of these small delights. Her want of knowledge had gone to Hilary's heart.

“Which will you play?” May had said the morning after her arrival. “Tennis or croquet?”

“I have never played a game in my life,” Amber had returned; and there was so much suddenly

awakened wonder, and—was it sorrow?—in her voice that they all felt grieved for her, and Hilary a thousand-fold more deeply in love—poor—*poor* darling!

It is all changed now, however, and it is with joy he sees how her gracious, lovely nature is at last given full play.

* * * * *

“I wonder what men Madam has invited to her dance,” says May. Lazily she throws herself back in her chair and yawns softly under cover of the paper she is holding. It is always a little slow waiting for the coming of the men after dinner. The waiting is longer than usual to-night, because Sir Lucien, having been particularly unpleasant all through the courses, grew so intolerable as it drew towards the grapes, that at last Dolly, with a nod to the two girls, had risen somewhat soon and carried them off to the drawing-room.

“Madam’s dance,” says Amber. “But it is not *quite* sure yet, is it?”

“Tuesday,” says Dolly, concisely. “I saw her to-day. Of course any sane person would give a fortnight’s invitation, but Madam is above all such silly conventionalities. The invitations are out. The dance comes off on Tuesday next.”

“Next Tuesday! Oh, impossible!” says Amber. “I haven’t a dress of *any* sort.”

“That’s what I say,” cries May. “I certainly shan’t wear that yellow thing again; I’m sick of it. What are you going to wear, however?”

She speaks to Amber, who has dropped upon a

low stool close to the fire in a little familiar attitude, that she would not have dreamt of taking when first she came to Carrig; but now she has grown into sympathy with her cousins—has learnt a little of their society ways, that at first had troubled her severely—and is very happy with them, although Sir Lucien is still a sort of conundrum to her, a bugbear. Why are they all so attentive to him? He has no virtues—*none*, she declares to her own heart. She has not taken into her calculations, however, that he has money to leave and an excellent *chef*.

“Wear? I tell you I have *nothing*,” cries she. “And Tuesday, a bare week.” She pauses. Oh! Madam *might* have told her. She grows very angry with Madam. Yet poor Madam, who has her good points, *didn't* tell her, in the hope that Sir Lucien would come to the rescue later on, and *give* her a gown for her dance. “Still”—faltering, as one might who knows the sum to be proclaimed altogether insufficient—“I have three pounds.”

“A fortune,” cries Dolly, gaily—a sin that surely is not laid to her charge. “But how to spend it. That's the real question.” As a rule, she gives from twenty to forty guineas for her own gowns.

“A bare week,” echoes May, aghast. Her consternation is for Amber, not for herself. If the worst comes to the worst, the yellow will do very well indeed.

“Couldn't I buy something and do it up myself?” says Amber, who had “done up” her few gowns since her mother's death.

“I've a better thought than that,” says Mrs.

Clarence, with all the air of a born genius. "I have a gown upstairs—a pink gown—it would suit you admirably, Amber. Will you try it on? We are very much the same height."

There is a little silence; then the girl leans over and kisses her on each cheek. "You are all very kind to me. I love you," says she, gently, "but I could not take your gown."

"Do you mean to say you are too *proud*?" exclaims Dolly, regarding her with unspeakable astonishment. "Good heavens! I wish some one would offer *me* a gown! shouldn't I jump at it? My good child, you are altogether behind the times; and besides, it's positively stupid of you. Isn't it, May?"

"It really is, Amber," says May, with feeling. What on earth *is* she going to wear if she refuses this noble offer of Dolly's? An offer that has rather taken May's breath away; Dolly up to this has never in the opinion of her intimates come under the head of the philanthropist.

"I know. I'm sorry. I can't help it," in a very small voice.

"You must be a thousand years old," says Mrs. Clarence. She laughs. She is evidently not in the least offended. Perhaps she is rather glad that the pink gown is not to be divorced from her wardrobe. "You won't let me help you then?"

"I should be unhappy if I let you help me in that way," says Amber, nervously, and then all at once, as it were, she looks up and speaks out what is in her heart. "It is this," flushing hotly. "*Now* I feel we are on an equal footing, you and I, even though"

—solemnly—“you are *rich* and I am poor,” which statement reduces Dolly to the verge of hysterics. Oh! the girl knows *nothing*! How lovely it is to know nothing! But after all—is it? Dolly reflects.

“But,” goes on Amber, in her soft, earnest way, “once I let you *help* me, as you put it—that is, shower gifts upon me—it would be all quite different; I should lose my independence, my self-respect—and——” She pauses; then, very softly, “I am too fond of you to wish the change in my feelings towards you that would surely come of *that*.”

“Doesn’t that sound a little ungenerous?” says May.

“I don’t know,” sadly. “It may. But”—flinging up her head—“I know that I should always shrink from you, if you gave me help that I could very well do without.”

“I suppose you call that proper pride,” says Dolly, who looks amused, but kindly. “I call it awful rubbish.” Here she tilts her nose, that Heaven has already been very kind to in that respect. “Now, for one thing, if you had accepted my pink gown, which is a little marvel, you would have made—well”—with a faint grimace—“let us say *Hilary*—sit up.”

“Hilary,” says Amber, coldly, “is the last person I desire to attract in *that* way.” The emphasis escapes her; and even Dolly, who is terrible, respects her so far as to refrain from commenting upon it.

“I suppose you think there is no necessity,” she contents herself with saying. “Well”—laughing—“there *isn’t*!” It delights her to think that Amber,

if in love with Hilary, will put aside Everard with a high hand; not just at *once*, but in time for the return of her—Dolly's—husband. She will thus enjoy two pleasures—the lowering of Everard's pride, and the cessation of the gossip that up to this has coupled her name with his. A letter or two to certain people in town hinting at Everard's undisguised admiration for a very beautiful Irish girl, and Dolly's conviction that an engagement will soon come of it, will clear the air for her before Colonel Clarence's return.

“I'll tell you what,” says May, who has been thinking. “We'll drive into Clountheen”—the next town—“and buy something there with Amber's fortune, and your maid can make it up, Dolly. She isn't half bad at a pinch. How will that do, Amber? Really Merton is a treasure, she fits one so beautifully. You remember that bodice she altered for me, Dolly, when we were in despair at the L'Es-tranges'?”

“She might be worse,” says Dolly, dispassionately. “She's sulky, I think. But she *can* be of use when frocks are found wanting. If”—with a little grimace at Amber—“you are not too proud to accept my maid's services, she——”

“Oh, no!” Amber laughs. “If you will let her help me, I shall be very grateful.”

“That's settled then,” says May. “And we three shall take an hour or two and spend your three pounds gaily. I do so *love* spending money. Why”—sadly—“isn't there more of it?”

“Yes. It's a beastly shame!” says Mrs. Clarence,

who has grown actually depressed. However, the sound of men's footsteps coming towards them across the hall at this moment dispels the light clouds that hang upon her fair unwrinkled brow, and it is with a smile, hopeful, if slightly anxious, she watches them all come in, and sees the door close behind them. It has not closed on Sir Lucien.

“Has he gone to bed?” asks she, eagerly.

CHAPTER XVI.

“There was a sound of revelry by night.”

THE two girls echo the question with their eyes. Sir Lucien at dinner had been so unbearable that they are hoping anxiously he will not put in a further appearance to-night. Dinner had been a torture.

The minor workings of his mind being his own, no one knows what has to-day so specially disturbed him, and led to the abominable temper he had displayed all through the courses that May and Amber would so thankfully have abridged; but Dolly, who is something of a *bon viveur*, had endured him stoically, and had enjoyed her dinner immensely, in spite of all difficulties. Just at the last she had hurried herself a little, in answer to the girls' appealing eyes.

“We trust he is in bed between the fragrant sheets!” says Mr. McGrath, sweetly; “repose I should say is most necessary for him. Judging by the extraordinary vivacity he displayed all through dinner, I should think the dear old man must be now quite exhausted. I felt very anxious about him, so I asked Martin”—his man—“about him,

and he has assured me he went straight to his room on leaving us. He left us early. *Too* early."

"I must say, Owen, I never heard anyone talk as much as you," says his sister—sisters can say what they like. "You ought to be padlocked."

"So he is *really* out of the way for to-night," says May to Gilbert Grey, who has seated himself on a cushion at her feet. "I'm so glad. Aren't you? Wasn't he *awful* at dinner?"

"A slight cessation of hostilities is certainly a relief," returns he, laughing.

Adare has crossed the room to where Amber is sitting.

"You are still alive!" says he, in an amused tone, when she has made room for him on the lounge beside her.

"Do you know," returns she, "I feel sorry for him. How terrible it must be to be hated and feared by everybody! Poor old man; I can't like him, but I do *pity* him."

"It's very good of you," smiling.

"Oh! I know you think it misplaced sentiment, but I don't. If anyone were to fear *me*, I should be unhappy."

"Yet you don't look it," says he.

"I!" She lifts her eyes quickly to his as if in amazement. Then, something she sees in his, brings a swift, hot colour to her cheeks, and her eyes once again downwards.

"*I* fear you," says he, in a low tone.

The situation is growing embarrassing, when suddenly Mr. McGrath comes to the rescue, quite in-

voluntarily, be it said. Indeed there is a touch of irony in *his* being the intervener, as he would have been the last person to get them out of their dilemma, or to come to their rescue in any way, had he only known, being one of those mischievous souls who delight in the perplexities of others so long as they don't go *too* far, don't touch the misery point. Owen, *au fond*, is rather lovable.

What he says now in a loud tone is meant to include everyone.

"Let's play a game!" He makes this suggestion with an air of the most engaging simplicity.

"Oh, hang games!" says Gilbert Grey, *sotto voce*, who is very happy sitting on his cushion at May's feet.

"Certainly *not*," says Mr. McGrath, with dignity. He always hears everything. "I disapprove of hanging on principle."

"Very wise," says Everard, with his soft smile. "Never know when it may come home to yourself."

"Just so," cheerfully.

"Well, I agree with Owen. I really think we ought to do *something*," says Dolly. "I suppose if we danced——"

"Impossible," cries May. "He'd hear the piano, and would certainly come down."

"But he's in bed."

"I don't care. He'd come down in his very worst——"

"Pyjamas," puts in Owen, anxiously. "Oh, don't! *Don't* let us risk such a sight as that!"

"Really, Owen, I must say——" begins his sister, with extreme indignation.

"You needn't. There's no 'must' about it; you"—agreeably—"can skip it. But look here, I know a grand game. He'd never hear us."

"We know your grand games!" says Grey, contemptuously.

"Honour bright, this time. It's really the funniest game going. Two people go out of the room, don't you know, and make up a proverb or a charade or something—it don't matter a screw which—and then dress up and come back."

"Oh, they *do* come back?" Everard asks this question in the tone of one consumed with curiosity. Mr. McGrath takes no notice of it.

"They come back dressed up, ye know, and the other lot have to make a shot at them, to guess what they mean, don't you know."

"I think we have all heard of that game," says Dolly. "Chestnuts are tiresome, and we can quite remember the last time *you* played it. It's still quite fresh with us. You went to dress with Edie Bathurst, and neither she nor you came back under a good half-hour. We found the interval a trifle stupid, as you had put us in rows, with all the wrong people placed next to each other."

"Oh, I say, what an awful story!" says Mr. McGrath, indignantly. "Half-an-hour to dress! Why, Edie is the smartest girl I know."

"That's it," says Everard. "That's what kept you so long."

"Well, she's not here to-night, anyway."

"No, thank goodness," says Mrs. Clarence.

"The best game in the world," cries May, starting up; "'tis 'hide and seek.' We leave two people here to seek us. We make up two people to hide—that is, the whole lot of us make up into twos, to hide, and if Uncle Lucien is in bed, I think, with precautions, he will never know anything about it."

"The best game in the world," says Gilbert Grey, moving to her side. Had there been collusion between them? "Will you hide with me, May?"

"Even when May's speech was only half through, Everard had walked deliberately towards Amber. "I think I heard you say you were not very familiar with games, Miss O'Connell?" He speaks in his slow but very charming voice.

"I am not, indeed"—with a gracious smile. Hilary, beside her, draws his breath sharply. He knows what is coming.

"Let me teach you this one." He pauses. He makes for effect sometimes. "Miss Adare has decreed that people are to hide in twos. Will you be my twin?"

"I should love it," says Amber, looking eagerly, happily round the room, where everyone is laughing and pairing.

"Well, come," says Everard.

He takes her hand and draws her towards the doorway through which the other pair is disappearing—May and—Owen.

Dolly's face, as she sees the first pair go, is a picture of surprise. Only five minutes ago she had heard Gilbert ask May to hide with him. Had she

refused? A little fool then! or had that troublesome Owen interfered? She was very close to the mark when she thought this. May's *tête-à-tête* with Gilbert had been swept down upon by Owen, and, unable to conquer the desire to make her true love even *more* her lover, she had most cruelly, if naturally, agreed to hide with Owen. At this moment Hilary, coming into the room, takes Dolly's hand. "Come," says he.

Grey having reached her with almost the same intention in his eyes, she pushes Hilary very gently aside.

"No, I shall go with Gilbert. You shall stay here and guard the goal!" Goal is one of Sir Lucien's best ottomans, now placed for convenience in the middle of the room. To stay here and meditate on Amber's going into hiding with Everard is what she really means! That, if anything, will bring matters between him and Amber to a crisis.

"I thought it was arranged that there were to be two to hunt! It seems unfair," says Hilary, smiling. He has suppressed the rage of grief and anger in his heart very successfully.

"There is no one left for you," cries she, gaily, disappearing round the door with Gilbert. "Come and hunt us, but don't come until we cry 'Cooee!'"

Hilary, with a heavy frown upon his brow, is left to wait until the promised sound shall start him on the war-path. Presently, the clear Australian cry (a very moderated cry now, lest it should reach Sir Lucien's bedroom) catching his ear, he begins his quest with an eagerness that never yet has he felt in this game before. Cautiously, but swiftly, he glances

behind *this* door, under *that* table, behind every curtain. At last, a little muffled shriek from May declares her and Owen's hiding-place behind the curtains in the library no longer a secret—but as Adare makes a pounce at her, she suddenly, and with abominable meanness, pushes Owen into his arms, and as both men collide, she slips past them and gains the ottoman in the drawing-room in safety.

“Caught!” says Hilary to Owen, then starts again. Dolly, who is remarkably fast in every way, would certainly have escaped, but that unfortunately the lace of her gown catching in the door handle of the morning-room brings her to an abrupt standstill, whilst her partner, Grey, who is racing after her, stumbles over the tail of her gown on the polished floor and comes with a tremendous crash to the ground.

Three captures! But where is Amber? Hilary, rushing to the drawing-room, looks in, to see only May and Owen sitting on the goal, evidently swearing at each other. No sign of Amber or Everard.

Jealousy begins to burn madly now, and with his face set he turns back to search again. With ever-increasing anger and disgust he tells himself he would throw up the chase altogether, and let them continue their so evidently interesting *tête-à-tête* behind some dusky curtains, but that this act would be commented upon by the others and betray the secret that he fondly, but erroneously, believes to be known only to himself and May. For all this his eyes grow remarkably keen; he leaves no corner unsearched. Anxiety is growing into misery, when

suddenly, out of a little corner in the dim old hall, she flits past him like a delicate swallow, and eluding his eager hand, flies up the drawing-room, and flings herself beside May upon the ottoman. Her eyes are shining, her lips parted in happy laughter. She has raised one hand to her slim throat, and her voice comes with a little joyous throbbing.

"Oh! Let us try it again!" Involuntarily, quite openly, her eyes turn to Adare. "Just fancy. You were quite near us several times. Once you touched my dress."

"You were very near goal all the time," returns he, in a low, reproachful tone. Everard is talking to Dolly. "In the hall—you had only to run round the doorway—why did you not try to escape before?"

"I don't know. Mr. Everard said it would hardly be fair. We were so *very* near the goal."

"Come with me this time?" says he, eagerly, passionately. That sly devil with his touch about fairness shan't have a second chance.

"Make them hurry," says Amber. The words are delightful to a lover's ears—or should be; but alas! he can see in her now brilliant eyes that the terrible joy of being *hunted*—of being very nearly *caught*—of making a splendid *escape*, are all she is thinking about.

These be joys that very many other women seek also; but in what a different fashion! Truly the game of hide and seek is an apt illustration of the life that some women lead. Happy they who reach the goal.

"Who's to hunt now?" asks Mr. McGrath, seating himself with a happy bang upon the long ottoman.

It gives an ominous creak as he does so. It is indeed clear to anyone of any intelligence that there will be very little ottoman left by to-morrow.

"I caught you, Dolly," says Adare, "but you get off, as I caught Grey and Owen too. By-the-bye, I didn't catch you, Everard, did I?" In his delight at seeing Amber, he had indeed forgotten all about the catching of Everard.

The latter smiles.

"I don't think so!" says he. "I'm afraid"—patting Adare's shoulder affectionately—"you think I'm getting too old for these kind of games! You are letting me down easy. I'm not in the running, you think."

"If ever I do catch you," says Adare, laughing very naturally, "it will be very bad for you. So look out."

Owen and Grey are as usual wrangling.

"You were caught first," says Gilbert.

"What's that got to do with it? You were caught second. Second thoughts are best. Besides, *you* and Dolly were caught together. That makes two to my one."

"Draw lots!" says Dolly.

"Yes, that's the best plan," declares Hilary, who is secure in his partner.

"I don't think so. It's very unfair," says Grey. "However, I don't care." This with a look of deadly reproach at May, who tries not to see it.

The lots are drawn, and once again luck decides against Grey.

"All right! Go on," says he, with a dismal affec-

tation of not caring. "But be quick anyway; don't keep me here all night."

This is distinctly brusque; no one takes any notice of it, because all know the reason. Once again he sees Owen carry off the perfidious May.

May, however, feels furious. What does he mean by saying "*he doesn't care*"? *He* doesn't care, indeed! Well, then, why should she care? And—recklessly—she doesn't either, so *there!*

She will take very good care he doesn't find her in a hurry anyway. Last week there had been a game something like this, and she had *let* him find her!

CHAPTER XVII.

“Faith thou hast some crotchets in thy head now.”

“THE last was a bad place, Owen,” declares she. They are in the hall now, discussing the possibilities of this place and that, as safe hiding-corners. “Where did you hide that night a week ago—before Amber came? You remember? Nobody could find you.”

“If you swear you won’t give me away, I’ll let you into it,” says Mr. McGrath, solemnly.

“I swear, then.”

“Honest Injun?”

“Oh, *go on!*”—impatiently. Miss Adare doesn’t seem to be in her sweetest temper.

“Don’t whack the willing ass!” says Mr. McGrath, with dignity.

“Well, where *were* you that time?”

“Hanging!”—briefly, but beautifully.

“*What!* Already!”—with saturnine gaiety.

“Oh! come, I call that beastly,” says he.

“Never mind, never mind, go on. So you were hanging?”

“By George, yes, and by the neck”—bursting into a laugh at the recollection, that is choked into its birth by the little shake she gives him.

“What misguided person cut you down?”

"No one."

"Good heavens!" says May. "I have had many disagreeable surmises about you. But don't say you are a spook."

"Not I. I'm all there, as a rule. I only *looked* as if I was hanging, don't you know."

"Oh! I *see*," says May, who is plainly and openly disappointed.

"It was like this——" His explanation is short and terse; knowing the cry "Cooee" may come at any moment from the other hidings, he hurries over his story at express speed. He had gone into a recess in a little room off the hall—where a hatstand stood—relic of earlier days—had found an overcoat on it—had ensconced in it his manly form. Had found, too, a tall hat, that he devoutly hoped did not belong to old Major Mulcahy (the dirtiest man in the county), a sort of familiar of Sir Lucien's, and pressed it down firmly on his brows. It went *over* his brows with a jerk, and fell right on to his neck. He knew then it *did* belong to the major, who had a head for a Titan, and was the uncleanest devil. However, in for a penny, in for a pound, and having thus miserably obliterated himself, he had crept close to the old hatstand and waited. He had so arranged himself indeed as to look as if he were actually hanged—a fate that his sister always said would eventually, sooner or later, overtake him.

Look here, I'll explain it to you," says he, dragging her across the hall to the anteroom described where the memorable hatstand is. "I got myself into position, *there*, d'ye see? Put on the overcoat.

By Jove, here's another one quite handy, and *another* old hat! Did you ever see such luck?—*like* the major's too! Nearly as greasy. *His* came down to my neck."

He tries on the hat in question, which certainly comes down to his shoulders, and emerges from it breathless, but full of enterprise. "Hair look funny?" asks he, hurriedly running his hands over it. The struggle with the hat had certainly done strange things to it.

"It looks as if you had slept in it," says May, critically.

"In the hat? Thank heaven, that is beyond me. Death, kindly death, in preference. It's a frightful hat."

"I didn't say that," says May, who seems to be listening for footsteps. "I said your *hair* looked as if you had slept in it."

"I do, as a rule," says Mr. McGrath, who is searching diligently amongst the garments hanging on the old hatstand. "It don't come off at any price—Oh! look here! I've found the old hat again! I'm afraid"—anxious inquiry—"we couldn't *both* get into it?"

The major's hat?" No, thank you! *One* of us couldn't, at all events."

"Not even in the cause of this great game!"

"*No*, thank you!"

"You are terribly narrow," says Mr. McGrath with a sigh. "However, here's the coat—we can both get into *that* quite easily."

"Certainly *I* shall not," says May, with extreme dignity.

"And"—with an indignation that crushes her dignity out of sight—"why *not*, pray?"

"Really, Owen, you are too stupid for anything. You are a bigger fool even than you look."

"I'm *not*."

"Oh!"

At this they both break into silent but irrepressible laughter.

"Anyway," says she, "do you suppose any girl would consent to be wrapped up in an old coat with you?"

"Lots of 'em," says Mr. McGrath, with absolute conviction.

"You honestly believe that?"

"I know it."

"I wouldn't."

"Very good; that's final, I suppose. And there's the 'cooee' now"—a long, soft note coming to them. "You may go away and get a better man to hide with—though I'm far from believing it—but I *know* you'll never get a better hiding-place. They passed within an inch of me last time I was here, over and over again, and never once even suspected me."

Here he turns away from her and begins to ensconce himself in the strange garments on the stand.

"Wait—wait," cries she, softly. Footsteps now are sounding in the hall outside. It would never do for Gilbert Grey to find her alone—unconcealed—unappropriated. "Is"—tremulously—"the coat big?"

"Made for Sir William Harcourt," says Owen, in a

stifled tone; "come on! You haven't a second! But the place in here is pitch dark."

"Dark!" She hesitates perceptibly.

"Oh, come on if you're coming!" cries Mr. McGrath, angrily; "what has the dark got to do with it? I'm not going to kiss you if that's what you're thinking."

This is really unpardonably rude.

"I meant nothing of the sort," indignantly.

"Sh—sh," whispers he; and indeed the footsteps in the hall are now coming perilously near. She rushes behind the hatstand.

It is indeed Gilbert who has entered. He marches quickly round the small room. There is terrible animosity even in the fall of his foot, May tells herself, trembling in the darkness. Will he see her? Find her? She hopes "Yes," and then hopes "No." The exigencies of the moment seem to make a necessity of the fact that Mr. McGrath's arm is passed tightly around her. Still, if he came near, she could push this silly Owen away. But, alas, the coat that envelops her and her fellow culprit comes down to her toes, and Grey, after a perfunctory glance at the corner where the hatstand is, and where it is plain to him that nothing can be but a particularly huge old coat hanging up—with a particularly dingy old hat on the top of it—marches out of the room again.

"Didn't I *tell* you it was the best place in the world!" says Mr. McGrath, with conscious pride. "That idiot never once *thought* of our being here."

"There are more idiots in the world than *one*!"

says Miss Adare, oracularly, and, seeing the coast clear, as she peeps round the doorway, she makes a little dash for the ottoman, and reaches it in safety.

Mr. McGrath follows her at great speed—the greater in that Grey has seen him, and is pursuing him hotly. So tremendous is Owen's oncoming that May rises suddenly from the "goal" to give him full play. Grey is too late. Owen reaches it, and flings himself upon it with a wave of triumph.

There is a crash—a roar—a sound of splintering wood! The ottoman has come to an untimely end! It is, indeed, no more! And Mr. McGrath, planted firmly on the ground, sits musing there, like Marius, amongst the ruins!

CHAPTER XVIII.

“The eye it cannot choose but see,
We cannot bid the ear be still;
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
Against, or with our will.”

OUT here under the lovely moonbeams, things are going very differently. It is one of those nights in the far autumn that seem to have been born too late, and that still breathe of the sweetness of a past July. As Hilary and Amber run lightly down the steps of the verandah, the delicate freshness of the night air falls upon them, giving them a delicious sense of coolness, of freedom. In there, the room had been so warm !

Amber, turning up her beautiful face to the heaven above her, stops, as if to drink more freely of this gracious breeze, and Hilary, watching her, feels his pulses throb. All day he had waited for this moment, and now it is his. He is alone with her ! When they had started on their hiding expedition, he had drawn her to the morning-room, and then to the window of it, that lay wide open to let the moonbeams wander in, and without a word passing between them they had both cast the game behind them, and elected to spend the few minutes they should have

spent cramped up behind curtains or doors—amongst the brilliant lights and shades of the warm night.

“The full moon from her cloudless skies
Turneth her face, I think,”—

On Amber *surely!* How could she resist so sweet a gazer? Yet she does not disdain the silver firs beyond, but lying on them too endows them with something of her glory. Sweet, shadowy corners, that seem to call one to come and rest in them, lie on every side, whilst here, and around, are broad wide stretches of light—silent, calm, and peaceful. All is silence out here, indeed, save for the musical tinkling of the little river behind the firs, that is singing its little song so softly to itself, and will sing it through all the quiet night, careless that no one stays to hear it—unregretful that all the world lies sleeping, save itself.

“I have been trying all day to see you alone,” says Adare; “but something prevented me. Was it”—smiling—“you?”

“How could I know you wanted to see me alone? Why,” smiling back at him in a little friendly fashion, but with open surprise in her eyes—“why did you?”

“What a question,” a little resentfully perhaps. Can’t she see? Does she not know? “For one thing,” he goes on, dropping into his former manner, and regarding her very earnestly, “to give you these.”

He has put his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and pulled out two dainty little boxes.

“I”—opening them—“want you to wear these instead of the others—that I’m afraid”—with much

self-reproach—"I made you give up." Here he holds out to her two rings on the palm of his hand. One can see that they are rings to be despised by no woman—the diamonds and sapphires in them flashing exquisitely beneath the rays of the watching moon.

"*For me!*" says Amber. She looks at them as if not believing. She has taken a step backwards in her surprise. But now their beauty draws her, and she comes nearer. She does not, however, attempt to touch them.

"Restitution of a sort!" says he, laughing a little nervously. "Ever since I have seen your poor little fingers without those toys you loved, I—I have *hated* myself. I have felt like a thief! But if you will put these on—— Why don't you take them? Are you *still* angry with me? Oh! don't say that. They should have been here some days ago, but I wanted them to be as like the originals as possible, and it took some time—and of course I know they are very paltry in comparison—but you *will* take them—won't you? You——" He hesitates now. What is there in her face that he cannot quite read? "You will try them on, and see if they will fit you?"

"Oh, *no!*" She does not really move this time, yet he is filled with the impression that she has shrunk from him. He looks quickly at her—passionate question in his eyes.

"I couldn't," says the girl, in a little choked voice—"I couldn't. Don't ask me, and don't—*don't* think me unkind or ungrateful, or—or horrid in any

way. Only——” She breaks off suddenly; and then before he has time to say anything she goes on again: “Can’t you see? can’t you understand? The thought of those rings is hateful to me. I wore them when I had no right to them. You said the word thief just now; *I* was the thief then. I think”—vehemently—“I *should* not have induced you to hide them in the old mill, but—but I had not the courage to tell Sir Lucien about them then, and”—sadly—“I have not the courage now either. He would not believe me. No”—stopping him, imperatively—“he would not. He would put his own construction on the way I got them, and it would only make things worse for poor dad’s memory. I have thought it all out, since I have been here. Do you know, *when* I came I had the idea of telling him. I fancied when Sir Lucien saw me, he would know that my father could not—*could* not”—here her poor little voice, in spite of all her courageous efforts to control her grief and misery and honest indignation, breaks pitiably—“have stolen or sold those stones; but it is all over now.”

“Give him more time,” says Adare, with a mad effort to help her in this distress that is hurting him even more than her; hurting him as though a knife had been driven into him. Poor—*poor* little darling!

“Do you think I can’t hear the disbelief in your voice?” says she, reproachfully. “*You* know as well as I do that if I gave him all the time that still remains to us he would not believe in my father’s honesty. I read that in his eyes and in his manner towards me. He will believe only when I or some-

one else give him back those dreadful jewels. He hates me."

"He is a devil!" says the young man, with sudden fierceness. "He hates every one." After a little while, "You know he thinks Deane has something to do with them."

"Yes, I know. Perhaps—perhaps he has."

Adare starts.

"Why do you say that so strangely?"

"I never really believed it before, but *now*——" She pauses, her agitation increasing. "He said once he knew where they were, but I did not believe him. He told me something about them, when—when——" She hesitates, and of course is lost. Adare catches her hands angrily.

"Go on! When?"

"When"—faintly—"he asked me to marry him."

"He *did* ask you then. That old man did not lie?"

"No; he asked me. And as a bribe—I thought then it was an idle bribe—he hinted that he could clear my father's memory—could and would restore the necklaces and all the missing ornaments if only I would consent to marry him."

"And you——?" His hands unconsciously have tightened painfully on hers. With a little haughty gesture she shakes herself free.

"Why," demands she, coldly, "do you question me like this? Do you think I should ever consent to marry a man like Brian Deane! You heard me before say I would not. But"—throwing up her head—"all this is nothing—nothing. The real ques-

tion is, *how* to compel Brian to tell where the hidden treasure is—if”—with suddenly renewed disbelief—“he knows!”

Hilary is silent. He has known for some time of the compact between his uncle and Deane, of the bargain the latter has made—Amber for him; the missing gems for Sir Lucien. Oddly enough Deane had not demanded the instant return of the girl to the old mill house. Nor had he mentioned to Sir Lucien his fear of Adare's infatuation for Amber. Perhaps he believed in the old man's power over Hilary to do away with that fear. The title would certainly be Hilary's after Sir Lucien's death, but if Sir Lucien disinherited him, the title would be a barren honour, or almost so. He had kept back, too, the belief (that was hideous to him) of Amber's love for Hilary—electing to play it as a trump card should things go badly between him and Sir Lucien; so that if Sir Lucien had had any suspicion of an attachment between Amber and Hilary—when first the girl came—it is quite at rest now. Indeed, Everard's open attentions to her during the past few days have completely reassured him as to that.

“Did you hear he was closeted with Sir Lucien again to-day?” asks she, presently.

“Yes.”

“Does that mean—oh! I can't bear to go into it—but *if* he knows where those *hateful* things are, my father must have known, too, and——”

“It doesn't follow!” exclaims he, eagerly. “And at all events, if they can be produced by Deane it will prove your father did not dispose of them. And

that, even though he often was in distress for want of money."

"But"—miserably—"what earthly reason could poor, *poor* papa have for concealing them?"

"If Deane could be made to speak we might find out."

The "we" seems to comfort her.

"I don't know what I should do if I had not you to discuss it all with," she says, with a little sigh that is very sad but very grateful too. She holds out her hand to him with a suspicion of tender camaraderie that touches him deeply. He takes it, holding it closely. Shall he speak now? *Now?* Could moment be more fitting? But the little hands lie so placidly in his, the beautiful eyes are so calm. Oh, no, not yet—she does not love him *yet*. Will she *ever* love him? Will it be only friendship on her side always?

It is very hard to let the hand go. But he *does* release it, not, however, until he has pressed a warm and lingering kiss upon it. As he does so a vindictive cloud flies across the kind moon's face, making the whole garden dark for the time being, and hiding from Adare the face he loves. Perhaps if he could have seen it—then—as his lips lay upon her hand, he would have spoken!

"Hi! there! You two!" A loud call from lungs calculated to last until their owner is ninety breaks the silence. To Mr. McGrath alone could those lungs belong.

"Oh, come!" cries Amber, hurrying down the path towards the house; "we must have been out

here ever so long. Oh! *hurry*." She flies on feet that would have outrivalled Atalanta, but just at the end of the verandah steps he catches her up.

"Amber"—seizing her arm—"one word. You won't hide again with Everard?"

"There won't be time, will there?"

This answer displeases him. How if after all—— And Everard, many women have loved Everard!

"Even *should* there be, will you promise?" His tone has changed.

Amber makes a pause. He mistakes the meaning of it.

"You don't like him?" says she at last, questioningly.

"Oh, I don't know!" He hesitates and hedges, as a man always will when the question of giving away another man is in view. "He isn't half bad. It isn't that. But of course"—a little stiffly—"if you wish to——"

"I don't," says she, quite simply. At which he laughs involuntarily and very gladly. "But I want to know why you said that."

"Can't you guess?" says he. "If there is so little time as you say, why—give it to me. Let us go and hide together *again*."

"Pouf!" says she, with an adorable glance at him as she runs up the steps. "Again! I suppose you think you are playing the game *now*, standing out here in the middle of the garden for all the world to see! You know nothing about it."

It is the most extraordinary speech! It might have come from a finished coquette—or from the

heart of a most innocent girl. How can one read a heart?

But there she is! And she herself speaks for herself. He casts behind him all false suspicions, but his heart is a little heavy as he follows her. She certainly had not refused to hide next time with Everard!

* * * * *

"You're nice people! 'Pon my word you are," says Mr. McGrath, darting down upon them as they come out of the shadow into the light of the drawing-room. "Awfully shabby I call it to keep out of the row like that!"

"Row?"

"Rather! my dear fellow. Battle, murder, and very *nearly* sudden death would describe it better. I fell on that confounded old ottoman in there whilst you"—with bitterness—"were disporting yourselves out there in the dewy stillness of the night, with birds and worms, and other nice things—and nearly broke my shins. Shins are painful, and of course I roared; and the old boy heard me, and came tumbling down, pyjamas and all, and pretty nearly blew us into next week."

"No?" says Amber, in a low note that designates terror.

"Yes," tragically. "And," with a glance that freezes her, "he asked where *you* were! You're in for a good thing to-morrow I shouldn't wonder!"

"Oh no," faintly. She looks at Hilary as if for protection. A little move that sets all his pulses going with joy and gladness. "You didn't tell him?"

"I was just going to," says Mr. McGrath (who would have died on the rack first), "when that misguided idiot Everard put in his shout and told a most awful tarradiddle. He said you had gone to bed directly after dinner with a violent toothache, and that Hilary was in the stables seeing after the young mare who had got the pip, or something. I'd advise you"—staring severely at Amber—"to have a swelled jaw in the morning."

"I couldn't," says Amber. "It would be impossible, and besides——"

"Nothing is impossible to Dolly's maid," says Mr. McGrath, imperturbably. "Ask her to balloon your cheek."

"What nonsense!" says Amber; and then, "Oh, how good of Mr. Everard," cries she, when of course she ought to have said how bad. For had he not told lies on her account! She passes the two men, and, gaining the drawing-room, goes quickly up to Everard.

"It *was* kind of you," she says. Her gleaming eyes are raised to his, her charming face is lit up with eager gratitude. It is impossible to mistake what she means.

"So much—for so little!" says Everard, in a very low tone, so low, indeed, that it reaches her only. But Dolly, whose eyes are as good as other people's eyes and ears, laughs to herself. It goes bravely for *me*, thinks she. I shall be able to shake him off in time.

"It was a great deal," says Amber. *Her* voice is news for the room.

“Was it? I must try to deserve your thanks later on.” He looks straight over her head at Hilary. It is a silent declaration of war, and as such Hilary receives it. He had shielded Everard’s reputation just now from this—*this child!* who would hardly understand the depravity of the man—but if Everard really means war, Adare feels himself relieved from all sense of friendship, of courtesy. Amber, if it comes to the point, shall know the character of the man who desires to marry her!

Dolly, sitting on a prie-dieu watching the little by-play, feels—not pious, but intensely amused.

“Were there ever such fools?” thinks she. And then, “It is very late,” says she, rising. Something in Hilary’s eye warns her to make a move. There was absolute murder in it, she told herself later on in her bedroom.

“Only twelve,” says Grey, gloomily. He has told himself that he cannot sleep without showering many, *many* unpleasant epithets upon May’s fluffy head; but now the chance seems vague.

“Twelve!” cries Owen. “*Only* twelve! The night’s an infant still. Wait—wait a moment. Sleep is but oblivion—whilst *I* can offer you——” He hurries across the room and dives behind a stool; and (after their long knowledge of him) so stupid are they all that they wait quite quietly for the fulfilment of the joys he has hinted at.

Presently he reappears from behind the stool. His face has a condescending smile upon it. He makes a gesture as if to fling back a flowing mane, that certainly his head had never possessed, and with a small

banjo under his arm he comes forward into the very middle of the room.

“A little thing of my own,” says he, sweetly; “thrown off last night! I can lay claim”—with a smile that is modest, yet great—to both words and mu——”

In a second the room is empty.

CHAPTER XIX.

“ His face was full of grey old miseries,
And all his blood's increase
Was even increase of pain.”

LAST night there had been rain as the darkness grew to dawn, and now a soft moisture is rising from the leaves lying on the sodden ground. Amber, picking her steps delicately, not on the wet path, but on the spongy moss that skirts it, goes on her way through the almost leafless wood, her head a little bent and a smile upon her lips that is half sweet, half sad, and full of a new wonderment.

The night gone by had been a strange one for her. For the first time in all her curious girlhood, she had, for one thing, lain wide awake as hour by hour went by thinking, thinking, and her thoughts carried her far and far, but always back to one centre.

That kiss upon her hand! It had gone from her hand to her heart and stayed there. What did it mean? That is the burden of all her thinking. Does he love her? *Can* he love her? Her, *her*! It is a tremendous question, and takes great answering. A whole sleepless night long—lying with sleepless eyes working it out—is surely but a very short time to give to so momentous, so wonderful, so—she hardly knows what sort of question it is.

At breakfast, held in bondage still, by this worrying thought, she hardly dares to look at Hilary; and breakfast over, she had slipped away to the eternal comfort, and rest, of the silent woods.

Here she will work it out. *Here* she will be able to think indeed.

Softly, but with a little chill in it, blows the wind. Now there are but few leaves left to play with it, to make a pretty fight, to shake their green and tender pennons in its face with saucy defiance.

Those leaves, alas! now

“Lie upon the dark earth brown and rotten,
Miry and matted in the soaking wet,
Forgotten with the spring, that is forgotten
By them, who can forget.”

Will she ever “forget”? All at once, walking quietly through the woods, she knows that she never will. She knows that she loves him. Such knowledge is an education in itself. The girl stands quite still staring straight before her. She loves him, and he loves her. She is quite as sure of one as of the other. Her soul seems to soar to heaven as this blest thought enters into it; and then all at once, in the twinkling of an eye as it were—it sinks to hell.

To love him, to permit him to love *her*, will mean ruin to him! Sir Lucien would not hear of a marriage between them—and—Sir Lucien has it in his power to disinherit him. Mr. Everard had told her that, when she was hiding with him last night. And—and of course there is something to be said for Sir Lucien. She will be fair! Quite fair. A girl

whose father is accused of doing away with very valuable jewels that in no way belonged to him, is hardly a girl one would wish one's heir to marry. Unless the jewels are restored, and her father's name cleared of dishonour, all joy and hope in her life are at an end.

At this moment she finds she has stepped off the mossy edge of the path, and is walking in a blind sort of way through the wet leaves. The discovery seems to her to be in line with her thoughts. The upper pathway on the nice soft mosses for the happy ones of the earth, for her the lower, the paths of discomfort.

It is at this point of her sad reflections that she lifts her eyes and sees Brian Deane standing a few yards away from her. She is conscious that she starts a little at his sudden appearance, but going quickly forward she gives him her hand, which he takes and holds, staring eagerly at her face. Heaven alone knows what fears he had entertained about her, about her being turned "into a fine lady," as he puts it to himself—during the detested visit to Carrig—and it is with intense relief that he sees she is quite her old self.

"Alone!" says he. All the love for her that his wild untutored heart undoubtedly knows does not prevent the touch of sarcasm that enters into his voice. "Not even the handsome cousin to keep you company. Or, perhaps," with sudden darkening of his frowning brows, "you are on your way to meet him?"

"I have come out to meet nobody," says Amber, coldly, and with a glance of scorn.

"I'm glad to hear it. I have been waiting about the place for days in the hope of seeing you."

"Why should you do that? Why not come straight to the house and ask to see me? You,"—with a little rush, as though the thought is distasteful to her—"you are my cousin."

"With all that damn lot round you? No! I wanted to see you alone. You"—he hesitates and coughs clumsily—"you remember that last conversation I had with you?"

"No," distinctly. "I thought it wiser to forget it."

"Your wisdom doesn't seem to have helped you," says he, with an ugly sneer. Then, with a sharp vehemence, "It's hard to forget— isn't it? Does anyone ever forget, I wonder? I would to heaven it weren't so hard, for then I might perhaps be able to forget *you*! But I can't, you see. That's what it comes to. I can't put you out of my mind."

"Why do you talk to me like this, Brian," says the girl, very gently, "when you know—when you *know*"—with agitation—"that it is so useless?"

"What *I* know," says he, his pale, dogged face now a dull crimson, "is, that it shall *not* be useless. No! by heaven! Mine you *shall* be. I have sworn it!"

Suddenly catching her by both her arms, he compels her with brute force so to turn that a fuller light from the dull sky falls upon her face.

"You think you love that fellow. You think that

he loves you—I tell you, you are a fool. Doubly a fool. . . .”

He breaks off. There is a slight pause, whilst her eyes gaze unfalteringly into his.

“Take your hands away, Brian,” says she at last, not angrily, not nervously, but with a cold courage, a haughty command, that seems to go to his very soul. He releases her instantly. “Of course I quite understand that you hardly know what you are saying or doing,” she goes on; “therefore I forgive you, and shall bear you no ill-will.” She lightly brushes down the sleeves of her coat where his hands had held her. All the most violent words of contempt or anger she could have showered upon him could not have conveyed to him half so clearly as this slow and simple gesture the state of her mind towards him. It is casting him from her into outer darkness indeed!

“Ill-will from you to me!” His tone now is changed. The passion in it of a moment ago is suppressed, and tinged with an acute anguish. “To bear ill-will to me, my girl, would be mere folly. Why *I* am the one who loves you! You—are the only thing I love on earth—the only thing I ever *have* loved. You think that Captain Adare will marry you? I tell you he neither will—nor *can*. His uncle would disinherit him if he did so. That damned young fool,” his voice again rising, is *playing* with you! But I—I love you!”

There is such intense reality in his whole air that Amber’s heart softens within her.

"I am sorry," says she, very kindly, very sweetly, but, as he feels, finally.

"What do you mean?" cries he, fiercely. "Be sorry for yourself! When he shows you plainly at the last that his uncle's thousands are more to him than a penniless girl—a girl, too, with the story of her father's dishonour hung round her neck, as her only wedding ornament"—here he laughs wildly—"how will it be with you *then*?"

He would have gone on, but she stops him.

"Listen to me," says she, her voice vibrating with some hidden feeling. "*Let* me speak. I am not going to marry Captain Adare. Be sure of that——"

"I am quite sure," interrupts he insolently.

"Be silent!" cries she, flashing round suddeuly upon him. "Who are you, that you should even speak of him! I tell you I shall not marry Captain Adare, nor any other man, until my father's memory has been made clear. You alone can clear it, if indeed"—here she pales perceptibly—"you speak the truth." She goes nearer to him—her eyes are burning into his. "*Is* it the truth, Brian? *Is* it? Why don't you answer? Why don't you speak?" miserably. "You say you love me—and love means sacrifice." (Her heart contracts as she knows the sacrifice that lies before her.) "And if you do know where [those dreadful jewels are, give them to Sir Lucien. Give them," she throws out her hands to him in a little passion of entreaty, "and *so* far at least prove that my poor father was not a thief!"

"And so leave you free to marry Adare."

"Oh, no! oh, no! I was not thinking of that."

"If I did what you ask," he has come very close to her, "would you marry me?"

He waits, and waits—and still waits. Then she lifts her face! God only knows what temptation she has passed through! It would have been so simple a thing to *promise*, and then, when the jewels were restored, to refuse to fulfil her pledge. But *when* she lifts her face it is so white and lined with grief that he hardly knows it. Still, she has decided.

"No!" says she, in a faint, sad tone. His nostrils dilate.

"You say that with a face like death itself! Has his supposed love brought you to look like *that*? I tell you the time will come when you will be glad to cast all thoughts of him behind you, and marry me!"

"I shall never marry you," says she, firmly.

They are both standing on the pathway, staring at each other, when a shadow falls between them. Amber's eyes are still flashing as she raises them to see Sir Lucien.

CHAPTER XX.

“The grey day’s ending followed the grey day—
All grey together, ruin and air and sky,
And a lone wind of memory whispering by.”

“OH, yes, I think you will,” says Sir Lucien, coming forward and addressing Amber. “I am quite sure you will.” He had only heard the last sentence of the conversation between Deane and Amber.

“I don’t think so,” coldly.

“When I tell you all the facts of the case,” says Sir Lucien, still very agreeably, “I am sure you will see your way to another answer. The fact is that—er”—he points to Deane very affably—“your cousin here knows something about those lost stones of our house, that your poor mother was entrusted with in a weak moment, by my father—and——”

“Pray spare yourself the trouble of going into it,” says Amber, with a wonderful calm. She thanks God secretly that they cannot *see* her heart as it beats tumultuously beneath her bodice. “I know all about it! Mr. Deane,” with a glance at him from under haughty, half-closed lids that should have withered him, “Mr. Deane knows where those jewels are, on which you have set your heart, and the price he sets on their delivery to you is—*me*. Well,” turning

faintly upon them, with grief and tears and terror and reproach in her beautiful eyes, "I am *not* for sale!"

"You forget one point," says Sir Lucien, his voice perfectly calm. "It is to clear your father's memory that we desire this thing. If Mr. Deane can produce these gems, then the suspicion of your father's having made away with them is at an end. If you marry this most estimable cousin of yours," he makes a delicate indication towards Deane, "he has sw—he—er—has promised to let me know where the stones are concealed. You see how the case lies." He looks at her for the first time fully! "You will consent?"

"No," says Amber, for the second time. Her tone is fuller now, however, and much stronger.

"*You refuse!*" Sir Lucien's face of affected suavity, now clouds into a sort of fury. "You refuse! who have been reported as so anxious for the clearing of your father's memory in this matter."

"My father," says the girl, clearly, "would not have had me clear his memory at the expense of my own happiness. He loved me too much for that. "You!" she lifts her eyes to Sir Lucien's, "you, who have never loved *anyone*, cannot, of course, understand this."

"Hypocrite!" cries Sir Lucien, furiously. "You, who have paraded your longing to see your father's memory made sweet, now, when the chance comes to you, refuse to use it."

"I am no hypocrite," says the girl, standing straight and firm before him. "I am no sycophant either. I

feel"—she turns and takes a step away from them—"I shall be better at home. Brian," looking back imperiously at Deane, "go and bring the dog-cart for me as soon as you can." Sir Lucien is about to give a hasty consent to this order, when his glance happens to fall on Deane. The strange, forbidding, but handsome face is dark with anger; a stronger, more dangerous anger than even the girl's refusal to marry him had called forth. As he looks the older man grasps the truth. Any insult to Amber—to the girl he loves, will be deeply, violently, resented by this strange, uncouth man.

"No, no," exclaims Sir Lucien, with a gesture of his hands. "I shall not allow you"—addressing Amber—"my guest, my—niece——"

Amber notices the hesitation, the reason for it, the swallowing of his pride, and the reason for that too, with a curl of her lip. Her mother—she too had been at times a little deceitful. How like the brother and sister are! Poor old dad was not like that; and yet—— "I cannot allow *you*—my niece," Sir Lucien is saying, "to leave my house before your visit has come to an end. There is no need for such violent temper on your part," to Amber, who has from the first been singularly, courageously calm. But perhaps he had not liked that last curl of her beautiful lip.

She is silent. War is raging within her—war between love and pride. To *go* is to satisfy the latter. To stay is to satisfy her love! Oh! to be *with* him for even a few hours longer! To see him, to be *near* him, though never, never, can he be more to

her than he is now. That he loves her, she knows. Her clear, sweet instinct has brought that home to her, though not a word has been said by him to her that she can dream upon. *Nothing*, except that kiss upon her hand last night. What magic lay in it! what wondrous charm! she—she alone can tell. But so strong is she in her belief, that no shame lies in her calm and loving eyes as she acknowledges to her own heart that, as he loves her, so does she love him.

And because of that sweet knowledge, and with its power full upon her, she wrestles with and overcomes her pride, and as all true lovers will—lets love stand triumphant!

“As you wish,” returns she, coldly, to Sir Lucien. “My visit, however, will be over in a very few days.”

“In the meantime,” says Sir Lucien, who is afraid of Deane’s frowning watchfulness, “you will, I hope, understand that you are a very welcome guest within my doors.”

She lifts her eyes to his for a moment, it is a little time, but his sink before hers; then turning away from both men she is soon lost amongst the trees and bushes.

“A troublesome subject,” says Sir Lucien, shrugging his shoulders as she disappears, and turning to Deane, whose gaze is still fixed on the corner where the last inch or so of her gown had been seen. “You have courage, my good Deane! Don’t you think so? A regular—er—er—— You might make a better bargain with me perhaps, for”—he glances anxiously round him. If walls have ears, why not trees?—“for

the possession of—— Well"—smiling palely—"we need not *say* it—eh!" But——"

"Her or nothing!" The answer comes clear and stern. Sir Lucien suppresses very cleverly an expression of deep disgust. What devilish fools some men are, he tells himself, and all for the sake of a silly idiot of a woman who has two eyes like anyone else, and can't have more than one nose! With two noses one might make something out of her. Not a beauty perhaps—but an income!

"You have given me your word that I can have the girl in exchange for the gems," says Deane, who has been so long buying and selling in very shady circles in Australia that perhaps he has got lost a little about the buying and selling in honest Britain. "That's good enough for me. But it will take time and *help*." He stops and looks hard at Sir Lucien. "You have sworn it, you know!"

"Yes! I have sworn!" A dark flush mounts to Sir Lucien's brow. Is it shame? Is it the thought that of all his old house he alone has been the one to play traitor to its honourable records.

"It shall be as you will," slowly—icily.

"As *I* will! What the devil is the good of that?" cries Deane, furiously. "What about *her*? Can you *compel* her to my will?"

"I think so." Sir Lucien is quite himself again; indeed the other's passion has helped to restore him to his usual chilly frame of mind! But, unfortunately, his calmness incenses the other.

"What your damn meaning may be," cries he, "I don't know. But——"

"I beg, dear Mr. Deane, that you will not give way to——"

This is *too* much Deane all at once loses complete control of himself.

"Look here," says he, in a hoarse voice. "You think yourself mighty smart, don't you? But I tell you that she's in love with that nephew of yours, and that it will take you all your time to get her to marry me!"

Sir Lucien stands silent. Of course the man is raving. But still——

"In love with Hilary?" says he at last. The question doesn't mean anything really; it is only put forward as a stop-gap, whilst he thinks.

"I don't know what his confounded name is," says Deane, sulkily, "but I'm talking of your nephew, anyway."

"I am sure you are mistaken."

"Are you?" with a snarl. "I'm not. You think you know a lot, don't you? I tell you she *is* in love with him, and"—he laughs a most devilish laugh—"I tell you more, man, he is in love with her!"

Sir Lucien's face grows livid.

"No! No. Impossible. I have watched them. Impossible, I tell you! And even if it were true"—reading and answering the look in the other man's face—"I swear it shall come to nothing. His life—his future—lies in my hand. Lies"—holding out his exquisitely shaped old hand and pointing to the hollow of the palm—"here!"

His voice has fallen very low, but his eyes tell a good deal. They at all events convey to Deane the

certainty that if Adare should persist in his mad infatuation for Amber, Sir Lucien would cut him off with the proverbial shilling.

"I can see what you mean," says Deane, still in a very surly tone. And then, "You will be at Madam's dance?"

"I don't think so," says Sir Lucien, who abhors Madam and all her works.

"You had *better* be there," says the other, with a threatening air. "I shall want your support, your countenance. *You'll* have to keep an eye on the girl that night, whilst I——" He takes a step nearer to Sir Lucien, and lays his hand upon his shoulder. "A word, Adare." Sir Lucien winces at this familiarity. "I"—lowering his voice—"shall keep an eye on him. Then we shall compare notes, and *know*. One has only one pair of eyes, my good fellow. You'll help me?"

"I am not a detective," says Sir Lucien, his nostrils dilating.

"Aren't you? You've posed as one very well up to this; I think"—with a sneer—"you had better keep up the part a little longer, until the stones are safely in your hands."

"You forget yourself, sir, when you speak to me like that," says Sir Lucien, his brows darkening. "Go, sir. Go!" haughtily.

"Oh! None of your damn rot," returns Deane, with a coarse laugh. "Do you think you can dismiss me *now*, with an uppish word or two? Have you forgotten those letters of yours? You'll come to that dance, do you hear? You spoke a moment

ago of having your precious nephew in your hand. Well, as you hold him, so I hold you." He spreads out his palm towards him. "Here! Just here!" says he, with a laugh of diabolical delight.

CHAPTER XXI.

“One in whose gentle bosom I
Could pour my secret heart of woes,
Like the care-burthened honey-fly
That hides his murmurs in the rose.”

ALL maids are “perfect treasures,” as we know, but Dolly’s maid has beaten the record; she has made a gown for Amber that is acknowledged, even by Dolly (who always keeps one foot upon her maid’s neck with a view to restraining her from getting up and demanding an increase of wages), to be a distinct success. It is indeed beautiful, and, if a simple frock can be so called, what must be the name for Amber?

She had found it hard to tear herself away from her glass, she had been so honestly and delightedly surprised with herself. She, who had never worn a *pretty* evening gown before, stood gazing at herself, with happy astonishment in her wide and smiling eyes. It is *really* she—herself. I’m afraid she was far from feeling as some heroines do, totally unconscious of her charms; a healthy, open vanity has taken possession of pretty Amber, and with it a great joy in the knowledge that she is looking “nicer” than ever she looked before. She might have been gazing at the attractive mirror even now but for one thought that rings in her mind. What will *he* think

of her? Oh! hurry. Let her hurry. Where are her gloves, and her lovely fan that May *would* give her, and—— He will be in the library now with the others.

So he is, and he and all the others fall into a little silence, as shyly—very shyly, and yet with an adorable look of conscious triumph in her shining eyes, she walks up the room.

“My word!” says Dolly. “It’s even better made than I thought. I’ll have to raise that girl’s wages. You’ll be the ruin of me, Amber.”

“You look lovely!” says May, in a low tone.

“Be proud!” says Dolly. “Even your sex praise you. However”—with a glance round her—“it is only your own sex. The other—— What an extremely awkward silence! My dear Eustace”—with a malicious glance out of her *very* slightly painted eyes—“can’t you *see* how lovely—that dress is?”

Everard looks at her curiously. What did she mean? He makes her no reply, and soon they are all packed into the carriages and *en route* for Madame O’Flaherty’s.

Madam receives them in an old red satin—that has seen so many better days that one trembles with fear at the thought that its final dissolution may take place at any moment—and really magnificent diamonds. On the topknot that usually distinguishes her a diamond pendant rests, nodding “lightly o’er her brow,” and two of the three chins are decorated with strings of the same gems.

“What a dreadful dress!” says May to Mr. McGrath.

"Shows very nice feeling anyway," returns that worthy, "tribute to the late lamented. Just a few fragments left of the never-to-be-forgotten hour when she and he blended their young lives in one."

"Why"—indignantly—"it must be *fifty years* since she was married—and a wedding-gown——"

"That's just it. That's the beauty of it. For fifty long and happy years she has worn that beloved gown, in memory of that too—*too* happy day, when——"

"Nonsense," says May, turning to lay her hand on Grey's arm.

"I say! Look here, aren't you going to dance this with me?" demands Owen.

"Certainly not."

"But I assure you, Grey"—turning to him—"she promised. . . ."

"How *can* you say that, Owen!"

"A little understanding somewhere surely: that night behind the hatstand you——"

May, with a furious glance at him, turns, and she and Grey go towards the ball-room.

"I think," says May, in a voice that actually trembles, "that Owen is the most hateful person I ever met."

"You didn't seem to think so the other night," says Grey, stiffly.

"If *you* are going to be cruel to me *too*, Gilbert——" The tremble grows accentuated.

"Cruel! *Who's* cruel, I'd like to know. As for you . . . come in here." He almost pulls her into a little semi-lighted room on his left. "I can't talk,

I can't think, I can't dance, I can't"—with a freezing air—"even bear to *look* at you!"

"Oh! Gilbert!"

"Well, I can't. What with that fellow following you about, and you encouraging him. I declare there was a time when I actually was fond of that scoundrel—but now! Look here"—frantically—"let us make an end of it. Are you going to marry him?"

"Marry him. Of course not," hotly. "What do you take me for?"

"Will you"—defiantly—"marry me, then?"

Miss Adare regards him with a frowning air.

"I must say you have taken a long time about it!" says she.

* * * * *

Sir Lucien has elected to come later, in his own private brougham, a decision that was warmly encouraged by his nearest and dearest. He has come very late indeed—when supper is well on—but Madam, seeing him, swoops down upon him instantly. She is always beautifully unconscious of the fact that he detests her, and has indeed been often heard to say that she is sorry she can't come over oftener to see poor Lucien and "liven him up a bit; he's such a dilluppy sort of person, don't you know." By which, according to Amber, she means poor-spirited. Most of Madam's speeches contain "a bit." It is her stock phrase.

"So you've come. Better late than never!" cries she, with all the loud *bonhomie* that makes him hate her. "Glad of it!—shake you up a bit. Nothing

for liver like a good shake. And I'm convinced you're liverish. Have you tried little——"

"My liver," interrupts Sir Lucien, with a stony glare that would have been effectual with anyone but Madam, "is as it always was. Same size and shape, and in the same place, so far as I am permitted to judge. I tell you this to relieve your feelings, though I think the subject indecent. I should also like to inform you that I have not needed to try any remedies, big, or"—with a withering glance—"little!"

"So delighted," says Madam, jovially. "'Pon my word I began to fancy that yellow look in your eyes meant mischief!" Sir Lucien winces. He is not above his little vanities, and he has always been considered a singularly handsome man. "Well, and"—with a triumphant glance round her—"what do you think of my little impromptu?" The invitations *had* been short.

"Mixtures are, as I am sure you think, wholesome," says he, in his nastiest manner, and with a contemptuous glance at some of Madam's friends. Madam, however, is impervious to all such light sarcasm. She takes his remark in the happiest spirit.

"A compliment from you, my dear Lucien! Really I hardly hoped for *that*, you old"—she makes a little lunge as though she would dig him in the ribs, but he avoids her—"old misogynist! Look here, there's old Lady Kilburn over there, see her, in a brand new *white* satin gown? Thinks she's a *débutante*, though she's your age to a month. Go and ask her to dance the next set of lancers. Do now! It'll do you both good. *Go*. It will recon-

cile her to the white satin, and for the liver there's nothing like dancing. Bless me! where has the man gone? Lucien! I say, Lucien! Oh, no doubt, how good of him, gone to ask her." Here Sir Lucien turns round and looks at her from a distant doorway with a scowl that penetrates even her three-fold armour. "Heaven help us," says she to herself. "He's even in worse health than I thought. He may say what he likes, but if taken in time those little—— Oh, Amber, my darling, here you are again, and looking lovely—*lovely*. Your cheeks like lilies blended with roses! I hope you are taking care of her, Mr. Everard?"

"I don't know," says Everard, who is looking very distinguished, and extremely quiet. "You must ask Miss O'Connell for a character for me."

"It's such a delightful dance," says Amber, laying her hand on Madam's arm, who lays her big fat one over the little slender clinging fingers, and taps them kindly, lovingly. "Oh!" with a little sigh of deepest content, "I feel so happy!"

"Long may you so be!" says Madam, fervently. "I see you brought Mrs. Know-Nothing with you." (She had never forgiven Dolly.) "A bad companion for a child like you. Don't you think so, Mr. Everard?" The latter is conscious of a sudden desire for mirth, but happily suppresses it. To appeal to *him*! "She may say what she likes about not knowing when her husband is coming home. In my opinion she knows right well he will *never* come home—until she has run away with somebody, and so made the coast clear."

"Oh, Madam! No," cries Amber, horrified. "She is the kindest, the prettiest woman. She is——"

"A mass of falsehood and frills! There, go along, child. Don't bother me about Mrs. Know-Nothing, but thank your God every night you are not such as *she* is."

She moves away abruptly to meet a tall woman, whom she is very anxious to cross-examine about her son's recent somewhat hurried departure from his home to distant lands.

Everard looks straight at Amber.

"She doesn't understand. She is prejudiced. Mrs. Clarence is as good a woman as exists," says he, slowly.

"How solemn!" Amber is laughing. "As if I didn't know it. Madam has always a fad of one sort or another."

"Come into the library—a rest will do us both good," says Everard, suddenly. A well of feeling such as he has never known before has sprung up within his breast. It is the one pure passion of his life. This child, so sure that all the world is good—so unsuspicious of evil, so ready to believe in the sweetness, the goodness of life, so ignorant of the evil. He had told her no actual lie, however, in his speech about Dolly.

She hesitates. A fresh waltz has begun. But indeed (she has been dancing straight through the programme) a little rest would not be a bad thing.

"Ah!" says he, "I must lose you, I see. To me, who am so much older, those strains are not so seductive—a sad admission."

"No, no," quickly and sweetly. "I was merely considering my partner. But really he is a stranger, and will not grieve very much for my loss. And I should quite like to sit with you in the library for a while. If he does find me there"—with a little laugh—"of course I must go with him. But I hope he won't. He is very big and very ugly."

They move away, unconscious that Madam's eyes are following them. But Madam's eyes are terrible things that roam about here, there, and everywhere, seeking whom they may devour. Her dislike to Mrs. Clarence is hardly a stronger feeling than that she entertains for Everard. And to see that "dear innocent" with him. "Well, anyway," says Madam to herself, with inward consolation, "it will make Mrs. Know-Nothing sit up a bit!"

Turning, she finds herself face to face with Mrs. Know-Nothing, who is sitting on a lounge, with a big fan and a general air of almost insolent boredom.

"Hope you are enjoying yourself," says Madam, with a malevolent smile and a snort.

"Oh, immensely! Immensely!" responds Dolly, rapturously, making a great matter of stifling a yawn behind her fan.

"You look it," says Madam, tersely. Then, "How's your husband?"

"I don't know," says Dolly, with a beaming smile.

"Heard from him lately?"

"I don't know," very prettily.

"You *must* know that, my good girl, at all events," says Madam with an air of triumph.

"I don't really," says Dolly. "He always directs

his letters to our place in Sutherland, and so of course—servants are so dilatory—I can't tell you if he wrote last month, or the month before that—or any month."

"Expecting him home?" with increasing volume in the usually too loud tones.

"I don't know." Dolly pats the seat beside her with an air of eager *bonhomie*. "Sit down, dear Madam, and let us *talk* about it! You look very fatigued."

"In my opinion," says Madam, with a burst of virtuous anger, "he'll never come home! Never! And small blame to him! I say it again. He'll *never* come home. You know *that* anyway."

"I don't, indeed," says Dolly, with more truthfulness than she usually betrays. It is to her extreme discontent that she knows her George is already on his homeward way. She raises her long glasses and surveys Madam with an air of surprised but placid inquiry. "You haven't heard he is dead, have you?"

Madam, distinctly routed, makes a gesture of supreme disgust, and without trusting herself to say another word makes a martial stride past her, and seeing a window open that leads first to a balcony, and then to the gardens beneath, instinctively makes for it, with the idea, perhaps, of cooling her fevered brow. Really, all these Castle people are unfit to be known! That shocking little woman inside would corrupt any decent society, and as for the man called Everard—she feels it almost her duty to follow him and Amber, and drag the dear girl away from him,

by force, if necessary—but she has gone through far too much already. She has now entered the shrubberies, and suddenly comes to a stand-still—her face a picture.

Another of them! Another of those depraved guests that Lucien has (ignorantly, of course, poor man) received beneath his decent roof! And Mrs. Know-Nothing's brother, beyond doubt. Who is he with? Ha! Madam, standing stiff as a setter that sees its snipe, and disdaining all idea of such meanness as would lead her behind a bush to listen—but listening with all her might just the same—knows that “poor little Edie Bailey, the unhappy child,” is in the claws of Owen McGrath. 'Pon my conscience! She knew it!

He had been persecuting her all the evening; she had watched them; and what that silly old fool of a mother of hers was about when she let her daughter dance with a McGrath! Everyone knew what sort Lord Kilfern was, and—like father, like son.

Mr. McGrath had, indeed, been making himself very conspicuous all the evening with little Miss Bailey, whose charms had first appealed to him at Madam's tennis party. Madam had been responsible for a great deal. The innocent Edie's mother, old and fat Mrs. Bailey, had noticed her daughter's repeated dances with one of the Carrig Castle people—she called it the “Cawstle”—with beaming eyes, to Madam's unspeakable contempt; and, indeed, when she saw the pretty Edie disappearing through one of the windows with Mr. McGrath, had given herself quite *airs* with the friends around her.

Madam, standing rigid now in the very middle of the walk, is unhappily, though she does not know it and would have scorned subterfuge, as has been said, quite unseen by the two delinquents, sitting so close, *very* close together on the garden seat beneath the laurels. The little fairy lamps hanging round them are not as brilliant as they might have been, Mr. McGrath's efforts to light a cigarette at five or six of them having had the effect of putting them out. The seventh had survived, and lit his cigarette, too.

"Have one yourself," he is saying now in tender tones to the attractive Edie. Madam grows cold with horror. Oh! the profligate!

"No, no," cries Edie, evidently putting back something, as there is a little rustle behind the laurels.

"Why not? Do, now," coaxingly, from Mr. McGrath. "It's ever so much nicer having a smoke with somebody. And your lips look as if they were made for——" (eloquent pause) "a cigarette."

"Oh, Mr. McGrath! If mamma could only hear you."

"Well, she can't, you know," says Mr. McGrath, cheerfully. "And mammas aren't much after all, are they? Though"—taking her hand in a sort of dream as it were—"your mamma is one of the sweetest women I have ever known."

"You really think so?" Miss Bailey is evidently impressed by this description of her mother—a description which certainly up to to-night had never suggested itself to her.

"I do, indeed. She"—fondly—"is just like you!"

"Is she?" Miss Bailey smiles first, and then grows thoughtful. She has evidently found cause for inward reflection in his speech.

"The very image," says Mr. McGrath, buoyantly. "So kind, so *beautiful*. Surely, I have not been the first to call her, or you, beautiful? *You* think she would object to your making yourself charming and sweet, and agreeable to—er—people? Ah! I know her better than you do. She'd love you to smoke a cigarette with me if she thought it would make me happy. *Have one——*"

Madam, quivering with rage, can see in her mind's eye—a quite astonishing organ with her—that he is offering her his cigarette-case.

"Oh! I couldn't," says Miss Bailey, laughing and drawing back a little. "I'm sure it would make me feel quite ill."

"Not it."

"It would. It would, indeed." Here Madam feels she must interfere. *Does* the increasing movement behind the laurels mean—— She has not time to continue the argument.

"It won't."

"But"—hesitatingly—"it *might*."

"Even if it does," says Mr. McGrath, tenderly, "I'll hold your brow——"

This is too much for Madam. The pathetic, the truly Samaritan side of it does not suggest itself to her.

"Edie Bailey, come out of that," cries she, in stentorian lungs. "What do you mean by smoking cigarettes with——" She pauses; the rest of her

sentence she knows now will be lost to the hearing of anyone. There is a mad stampede through the laurels, and even with her peroration on her lips, her audience is *nil*.

"Ha!" says Madam; "if they think to escape me they make a great mistake. "I'll go in and see if they are dancing; if not——" Her face conveys the fact that she will pursue them to the death! In the meantime there are other people to be considered. She has not forgotten the fact that when last she saw Amber she was with Everard.

Now she will go and warn *her*, the little Bailey girl being safe for a minute or so. But how to warn Amber, who is at times a little difficult? She meditates; and then a bright thought comes to her. Hilary will be the very one to whom to tell her doubts. Of all the Carrig party, he alone is approved of by her. Yes, she will get Hilary to look after Amber. It is just when this thought has occurred to her that, as ill luck will have it, she meets Hilary.

"My dear boy, you!" says she. She had known him off and on since he was very young. "The very one I wanted."

"Can't you wait a little later, Madam?" asks he smiling. "I'm in a hurry now. I'm looking for your favourite, Amber."

"Ah! *That's* my want!" says she. "So you don't know where she is then?"

"No." A sense of fear lays a cold hand upon his heart.

"She went to sit out the last dance with Everard," says Madam. "That *I know*; I'd be glad, my dear

Hilary, if you could find her, and prevent her from sitting out the *next* with him. But from what I could see, I——”

She says a good deal more, but Hilary does not hear her. He has gone back to the house.

CHAPTER XXII.

“For till the thunder in the trumpet be,
Soul may divide from body, but not we
One from another.”

THE light is dim as he enters the library. He had searched many rooms before finding her here. Now he can see her, sitting in a big soft chair, close to Everard, who, in a chair of a harder make, is leaning forward his elbows on his knees, evidently in earnest conversation with her. Through the half dim light Amber's beauty, so soft, so kindly, shines like a star. Her pale and charming frock looks like the garment of an angel, and her hair, with the little curling feathers in it, like burnished gold.

The very exquisiteness of her only serves to raise higher the rage that is burning in Hilary's heart.

He walks straight up to her.

“Our dance, I think.” His tone is so abrupt—so almost choked—that the girl looks up at him very suddenly.

“Ours? Is it?” She rises. “You must tell me the rest another time, Mr. Everard,” says she over her shoulder.

Adare leads her, not to the ball-room, but through the hall to the balcony by which he had just entered the house in search of her.

"What is it?" asks she, a little nervously, alarmed by his silence, his rapid movements (he had almost *carried* her along with him), his whole air.

"What should it be?" He has stopped at the end of the balcony, where the shadows are thicker.

"Nothing, I suppose," plucking up a little spirit, "only your manner is so strange, so abrupt. And I thought your voice sounded angry just now. But"—laughing anxiously, tentatively, as if feeling its way—"I think I only fancied it."

"No doubt." He leaves her abruptly, and going to the railing of the balcony, crosses his arms on it.

He is struggling with a mad passion of jealousy and despair. If this one woman will not love him, what can all his life be to him from this day forth? What good, what joy, what comfort can it contain? Oh! and more than that, can he even *live* without her?

The quick sound of her feet behind him checks his thoughts. He turns to her a frowning face.

"Ah! don't look at me like that!" says Amber. "Don't look—but *tell* me." A little gentle hand is now slipped into his. "*Tell* me what I have done!"

Was ever girl like this one? Oh! the sweetness, the grace of her, and the little hand so generously thrust into his own!

"Don't you know? Can't you guess?" cries he, in a stifled tone, "what I felt when I saw you there in that dark room with"—violently—"that cursed fellow."

"No," says she, in a low tone. She draws back involuntarily, as if frightened by his manner. "Why

do you speak of him like that? Why should I not be with him? I like him; he is always very kind to me. Of course I always felt *you* did not quite like him, but——”

“I despise him,” begins he, sharply, fiercely, then checks himself. After all, what is he to say? How explain to her that Everard’s reputation is not all it ought to be? Come down,” says he, hoarsely, pointing to the gardens beneath, “I can’t talk to you here.”

And, indeed, the dance being over, many merry couples come pouring through the windows on to this particular balcony. He makes a slight gesture and she runs down the steps, he following, and so into one of the many walks beyond.

“Let us stop here,” says he, when they have come to a clump of evergreens that hides them effectually from any passer-by. His heart is still hot within him, and his voice sounds to her stern and harsh. Such a tone from Brian Deane would have been met by cold anger on her part, but from Hilary! “I must speak to you.”

“Oh! but not in that voice.” She lays her hand gently on his arm. “You have been so good to me always that—that you will have to go on being good. And really, Hilary,”—raising her sweet eyes to his with the sweetest friendship in them—“if I had known that you did not wish me to sit out a dance with him. . . . He said he was tired, you know.” (Adare smothers a very unpleasant word.) “And *I* was a little tired too. And so, but”—shaking her lovely head, eagerly—“it wouldn’t have given me a bit of

trouble to refuse him, because I am sure Owen"—she has learned to call Mr. McGrath by his Christian name—"or Mr. Grey, would have been kind enough to sit out the dance with me too!"

"Or even I," says Adare, in a low and bitter tone.

"Well, or you," prettily. "But then Madam depends so much on you. I saw how she kept you going all the night with this and that, and everything. And so of course I should not have dreamed of bothering you."

"Is *that* how you look at it?" says he.

She nods delicately, and then, "You are not angry with me any longer, are you? And if you don't like it, I shall sit out no more dances with Mr. Everard, as you say you do not like him. Though why . . . Any one else will do quite as well when I feel tired. Owen or—— You"—with an anxious glance—"don't dislike Owen, do you?"

Adare meets this poser very badly. A frown gathers on his forehead, doubt contracts his heart. Is this slim, exquisite creature, with eyes like the stars above them, and with such lips as speak of purity alone, a mere coquette, a trifler of the first water?

The old distrust is now full upon him. Is she—is she honest? Her mother—— And then comes the revulsion of feeling, the longing to *kill* himself for his disbelief in her. Oh! no, no. Such eyes as those could not play false with any man."

"No," slowly, "I do not dislike Owen."

"You *like* him then?" a little persistently.

"I like, and"—meaningly—"trust him."

"Ah!" She pauses. Then, slowly, "The one you don't trust is me!"

There is something so calm, yet so poignant in her tone, that all at once he forgets his own injuries, and gives his mind to hers—a fact that proves him *indeed* her lover.

"You! What are you saying, Amber? To distrust you!" His tone is indignant, yet what has he been doing for the past half-hour?

"Well, you do," says the girl, softly, but miserably. "I don't blame you, you know. Anyone would. You find fault with me now for every little thing, but it would not occur to you to treat me so, if those missing jewels were not in question. I have——"

"*Amber!*"

"I don't care!" She sighs and turns away from him, and her beautiful mouth quivers for a moment. A moment only. "When you saw those rings——"

"What do you mean by that?" interrupts he, passionately. "Would you have had me keep silence then? That would have been to play the part of a coward. A coward to you and to myself."

"I know," faintly.

"You would not have withheld the truth?"

"No, no, but it isn't that. I am not thinking of that. It is only—that now, to-night—you have distrusted me. You will distrust me always." Her voice is low and anguished.

"*Never!*" says he. "What is it? What have I said? I have hurt you——"

"Oh! you *have!*" cried she. "You have brought

it all back! You think of me as one dishonest—as—— But I *never* knew about those rings——”

“Amber! how dare you say such a thing as that!” Suddenly in his grief and despair all things are cast aside and she is in his arms, her cheek pressed against his own, his heart beating madly against hers!

“My darling! my own!—Amber! Oh! it is folly to tell you I love you. You know—you must know.”

“Yes, yes. But you must *not* love me.” This is dreadful; but he takes courage from the fact, that as she gives sound to this awful sentence, her arms tighten round him. He passes it over very lightly indeed.

“I’m not worth thinking about,” says he. “But do you love *me*, my sweetheart?”

“A long pause. He can feel she is bracing herself for a tremendous effort.

“No!” says she, in a tone that she fondly hopes is heroic, but is only tearful.

“Oh! Amber! and here.” He tightens his arms round her. “To say that here.”

“It was a lie,” cries poor Amber, giving in miserably. “But *how* can I love you, or let you love me, with this stain on my father’s name?”

“Nonsense! if that is all,” jubilantly.

“It *is* all,” solemnly. “But—no—let me stand away from you. But—it means everything. I shall not let you love me until my father’s memory is cleared.”

“Why, think, darling,” cries he, still holding her

hands, as he cannot hold herself. "Who believes in that absurd story of the missing jewels, except our mad old uncle, Sir Lucien?"

"*And Brian Deane!*"

"I don't believe he knows anything. I don't, really. He has only been working on Sir Lucien's nerves, first, perhaps, with a view to making money out of him, and latterly to get him to forward his marriage with you. *You!*" He stops as if overwhelmed, as if words fail him to express his anger and contempt at the presumption of Brian Deane.

"Still, Hilary"—she pauses, and pushes him a little further from her—"still—I"—her voice grows strangled—"I *cannot* marry you. Don't"—turning to him, and holding out her arms afresh—arms swiftly caught and held—"don't think me cold, or heartless, because"—sobbing and clinging to him—"I *do* love you, I do, I do."

"My own darling girl!"

"Only—to marry you! With such a cloud as this shame hanging over me—the 'only wedding ornament,' as"—crying bitterly now—"Brian said, I had to wear round my neck. Oh! no. I *couldn't!*"

"Look here," says Adare, whose face is very white. "I'll shoot that devil if he ever dares to insult you again."

"Oh, Hilary! Don't say things like that. Don't let us speak of him at all."

"He is not worth it, heaven knows. Let us"—with a quick smile—"talk of ourselves instead. You are mine now, you are *mine*, Amber! Say that."

"No, no," falteringly.

"You are, anyway. You"—steadily—"may as well make up your mind to it. Here"—smiling and pushing her from him at arm's length, but holding her hands very tightly all the same—"stands my affianced bride! That's like the good old penny dreadful, isn't it?"

They both laugh, she a little faintly.

"You won't tell anyone about it, will you?" she entreats, and then, seeing rebellion in his face, "You *will* promise that, you *must*. You will promise faithfully to tell no one."

"I don't think I can. At least"—smiling at her perturbed face—"not faithfully. I want to tell Sir Lucien for one."

"Oh! *not* Sir Lucien."

"He first! I could not"—drawing his breath sharply—"stand the idea of hiding our engagement from him of all people." There is so much loyalty towards her in this eager desire to tell the man who has been so unjust to her all along, of his own admiration and love for her, that Amber's eyes grow full of tears, half sad, half happy. Oh! if only things had been different!

"He"—miserably—"will disinherit you."

"Let him! I've a thousand a year of my own, left me by my poor mother. We can pull along very well on that. Can go out to India, and live happy ever after."

"You would give up all Sir Lucien's immense wealth!" She turns upon him with flashing eyes. "And for me! No, no! Do you think for one moment I would hear of such a thing? I take back

every word I have said. I won't be engaged to you, Hilary. No, not in any way. You may think I don't mean it, but I do."

"Will you take back, 'I love you'?"

"Yes, certainly. I never meant it. It"—with a little stamp of her foot—"was a mere folly. Of course I don't love you."

So firm, so determined is her whole air, so fierce is the stamp of her foot, that in spite of his effort to control himself, Hilary bursts into a roar of laughter. He is horrified at himself, but cannot control his amusement, and indeed it stands him in good stead. If he had talked to her sensibly for half a day, not one of his wise arguments would so have convinced her of his determination to have and to hold her as this irrepressible burst of laughter does.

"Forgive me," says he, at last.

"Oh! you can laugh if you like. But I mean it." Her tone, however, is a little feeble.

"Not you," says he, comfortably. "And even if you did,"—drawing her tenderly to him, and pressing her sweet and lovely head against his shoulder—"it would be of no use. I have given myself to you. And you have given yourself to me, and——" He pauses. "Well, that's all," says he. And so it seems it is.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“There is a feverish famine in my veins.”

SHE has, however, extracted from him a promise not to tell Sir Lucien until she has left Carrig, which will be the day after to-morrow—during their return to the house. A promise reluctantly given—and remembered as reluctantly afterwards!

Almost as they reach the yellow rays of light that lie across the paths beneath the windows, two men coming out of the shadows approach them—Sir Lucien and Brian Deane.

“Have you nothing better to do, Hilary,” says Sir Lucien in a clear tone, subdued, but full of ungovernable temper, “than to walk about the garden all night with—Miss O’Connell?”

Miss O’Connell! The insult is deliberate.

“I have been with *my* cousin and *your* niece!” says Adare, slowly and defiantly, and with a good deal of accentuation.

“You have been with the girl who is to marry Mr. Deane!” says Sir Lucien. He turns and beckons Deane forward. “See to it. See to it,” cries he, furiously. A very madness has entered into him. If the girl will not marry Deane, then the bargain between him and Deane falls to the ground, and

the jewels will never be his. Oh! what is the worth of a silly girl's happiness, in comparison with the possession of those priceless stones?

Deane has come forward. His face is livid as he meets Adare. Involuntarily he thrust his hand into his left side, beneath his coat. No doubt in the land he had just come from, revolvers at times are handy little things. Without a revolver, Adare's set and stern face is distinctly disagreeable. Out of the darkness that surrounds all this, a girl's voice rings clearly—

"I am not going to marry Mr. Deane!"

"It is Amber. It thrills through Adare. But why did she not say she was going to marry *him*? It would have eased so much of the tension. His promise to her *alone* holds him back from speaking aloud just now.

"Pardon me! You *must*, I think. Your father's name and the disgrace attached to it will prevent your——"

"Why should she remember her father's name?" breaks in Adare, violently. "Her father's name so far has no stain upon it, save what his"—with a contemptuous and lengthened glance at Deane—"his *relation* has chosen to cast there. As for my cousin"—looking at Amber—"she tells me she is not engaged to Mr. Deane."

"She seems to be very communicative with you." Sir Lucien's voice is now vindictive. "May I ask"—slowly—"if she is engaged to *you*?"

A pause.

Adare at this juncture would have made a decla-

ration of his engagement to Amber, in spite of that promise he had given her only a few minutes before. But looking at her, as if to command her permission to speak, the anguished look in her eyes forbids him to go further. He is about then to answer Sir Lucien in some slight trivial way, though his heart is on fire, when Deane breaks the silence. Passing suddenly by Sir Lucien, he comes close to Amber.

“Give me five minutes.”

Adare, who is standing beside Amber, pushes him unceremoniously aside. “Not one,” says he, in a voice of concentrated fury.

“Yes, *one*,” says Amber.

She lays her hand on Hilary’s sleeve, and looks at him. “Just *one*.” Her voice is a mere whisper heard by him alone. “It will be better. It will be —*the end*.” Then she turns to Brian.

“If you wish to speak to me,” says she, “I am very ready to hear you. Will you come this way? It is very quiet in the garden.”

* * * * *

“Well!” demands she, facing him. She feels quite safe and full of courage. Some instinct tells her that Hilary, who had so reluctantly obeyed her wish, is still somewhere near, out of sight and hearing, but where a sound from her would reach him.

“Well,” repeats he. “Is it well for *you*? You think you are going to marry that fellow, Adare. You still think he will prove true to you, when he knows that if he does marry you, his uncle will disinherit him?”

"I don't think it," says she, in a clear, intense voice, "I know it."

"I defy you to *know* it!" his breath coming more quickly. "Until to-night, although I have warned him of it, Sir Lucien never quite believed that his nephew"—with a contemptuous intonation—"condescended to admire you!"

"Still, I know it," repeats she, coldly. "And as for Captain Adare's not knowing that his uncle would probably disinherit him if he married me, I told him so myself. But I need not have done so; he had quite made up his mind about it."

"Ah!"—furiously—"then you have promised to marry him."

"No." Even in this dim light he can see the sad and grievous expression that clouds her face. "I have refused him."

"Refused him!" Deane stands back from her, amazed, incredulous. "This is a trick," cries he, violently.

"Cannot you *see*," cries she, turning upon him in a passion of pain and grief, "that I *could* not marry him? I love him." She presses her hands as if in pain upon her breast. "I love him; but with this stain upon my father's memory, I shall never marry him."

"You mean"—he stoops as if in the gloom to get a surer view of her face—"that until those jewels are restored, you——"

"Until then," faintly.

"You mean"—persistently—"that if those jewels are never found you will not marry Adare."

“Yes, I have told him so”—she sighs heavily. Deane breaks into a sudden insolent laugh and then as suddenly grows silent. Something in the very calm of Amber’s manner has at last convinced him, that any hope he has entertained of making her his is at an end. But he can at all events prevent her from ever being Adare’s! The day after to-morrow he will leave; and catching the boat on Thursday next, be out of the country before Sir Lucien is even aware of his having left the Mill House. And even if pursued, what chance of convicting *him* of having anything to do personally with those stones? No, he has arranged a plan too good for most detectives. A man of quick resolves, he now makes up his mind in an instant on a matter that might have taken other men many an hour to decide upon.

“Not him or any other man,” says she, slowly. That laugh of his angered her. There had been distrust of Adare in it.

“That lies in the future,” retorts he. “As for me, I have not mentioned it before, but Esther and I start for Australia shortly. This is a secret I know I can trust you with. It lies with you now to either come with us or stay here—*here*, where you are treated with contempt, and despised, and where, if you are in earnest about your refusal to marry Adare until your father’s memory is cleared, you will find yourself deserted and alone. For”—with a strange glance, menacing, yet appealing—“that will never happen! Those jewels Sir Lucien has set his soul upon, will never fall into his hands!”

“You only convince me that you know something

of them," says she, in a low clear tone. "I feel"—her eyes bent piercingly on his—"it is useless to appeal to you, but, if you *do* know where those jewels *are*, *hear* me! I swear I will not marry Hilary, or any man—that I will die unmarried—if only you will clear my father's name? Is that not bribe enough?"

"Ha! you have come so far as that," says he. "Well! you must go further. Swear you will marry me, and——"

She turns abruptly away, as if despising him too much to answer.

"Just as you will," he mutters, sullenly. "However, a last word. If at any hour you elect to come out to us—and I believe Adare will fling you aside when he knows positively what his marriage with you will mean to him—then, you will receive from me a cordial welcome. Bear that in mind, my girl. It is worth a thought! And—another thing—if you agree to cast in your lot with us, you need not think that it must necessarily lead to marriage with me. No! By heaven, no!" His strange, wild face looks tragically, honestly earnest at the moment. "You shall be free to choose betwixt me and many another; to——"

"You have not left me free this time," says she with a faint smile. "But if you are really going, Brian, good-bye. We are not likely to meet again."

"You forget—you are coming home to-morrow."

"No, I had not forgotten. But to-night Madam asked me to go and stay with her for a week—and——"

“Ah!” cries he, fiercely, with the fierceness of acute mental agony. “You are dwelling on the thought that this is our last meeting. You *hope* for that! But”—in a choking voice—“it is not our last meeting; in spite of you, I shall see you again——”

“It would not be in spite of me, Brian,” says she, very softly and kindly, touched by the certain misery of his whole air. “I only thought it would be for the best for you and me not to meet again. But if you wish to bid me another, more open farewell, I shall be glad to see you at Madam’s.”

“Let that rest,” says he, roughly, making a gesture as if pushing something aside. “What I want to know is, what you are going to do when I am gone. Madam”—with a glance at her—“will go, too! And you! Are you going to live alone in that old house?”

“I have lived alone the greater part of my life.” Her voice is very sad and forlorn. “I shall not mind the loneliness.”

“You lie!” cries he, fiercely. “You will *not* live alone, even if you do not marry him—you——” His voice fails him. Something in the unmistakable surprise—the open want of understanding in the girl’s eyes makes him feel dumb before her.

“Certainly, I shall not live alone in one sense,” says she, with a dignity that is blended with astonishment, as to the meaning of his late outburst. “I have had no time to think of it yet; as I had no idea Esther would go back with you this time. But I am sure old Mrs. Blake and her daughter—you know how poor they are, and how respectable—would come up

and take care of me and the house. They are quite nice people, and will not trouble me at all, and I think it will be a help to them. So you see"—with a rather haughty, if distinctly puzzled glance (for what on earth had he meant?)—"you need not be at all uneasy about me."

CHAPTER XXIV.

“That practis’d falsehood under saintly show.”

“Do you know,” says Mr. McGrath, glancing portentously at May, who is lying in a charming, but somewhat languid manner in a lounging chair, “I have always been given to understand that our Irish brothers and sisters were famed for their modesty.”

“Well, what’s the matter with them now?” demands that pretty little person, “and why do you look at *me*?”

It is quite ten o’clock, and though they have been telling each other that they are “quite worn out,” and “tired to death,” and positively unable to keep their eyes open after Madam’s dance of the night before, still they are all here in the drawing-room, discussing over and over again the events of last night.

“On this occasion *only*,” says Mr. McGrath, who can see that Grey is already seething with rage, “I am not alluding to you, my *lovely* May!” Here Grey looks murderous. “I am indeed alluding to quite an elderly person. I can only pray, my dear girl, that as years go on you will not arrive at *her* frame of mind—but it will take a very *strong* man, in my opinion, to keep you in the path that——”

"What on earth is the matter with you, Owen?" breaks in Dolly, irritably. She objects to a row, and she can see by Gilbert Grey's eyes that it is brewing. "Can't you say what you mean? *Who* has been doing something amusing—I mean improper?"

"I don't quite like to mention names," says Mr. McGrath, with a modest simper, "but really last night things were said to me that made me blush. For one, Mrs. Bailey—know Mrs. Bailey?" looking around him appealingly. "Very, *very* big woman—I—er—I *had* to listen."

"Owen," says his sister, with severity, "I forbid you to go on. Anything that brought a blush to *your* cheek—— Well! It ought to be untranslatable at all events!"

"Still I think I had better tell you," says Owen, with all the air of one who feels oppressed by a sense of responsibility, "if only to put you on your guard and to get up amongst us a little crusade (you know these little crusades are so popular now—one always sees one's own name in print about them) to take her dear girl out of her hands."

"What nonsense, Owen!" Mrs. Clarence has sat up, however, and the others have all followed her example. "What *has* that dreadful old Mrs. Bailey done—or said?"

"You may well ask. She had the audacity to tell me that her eldest girl—(my little girl's sister, you know, she called her "my sweet Cawtherine)—was presented in Dublin last year, and——"

"Owen! I protest," cries his sister, faintly.

"Well, am I to give my warning, or am I not?"

demands Mr. McGrath making a really touching appeal to those around him, but, very sensibly, does not wait for their verdict. "All I can say is that Mrs. Bailey, when I was sitting near her, said—I think she was looking at Madam's diamonds—'Well, give *me* simplicity. When my darling Cawtherine was presented in Dublin, to His Excellency, she wore *nothing on earth* but a string of her grandmother's pearls around her neck.' "

"Owen," says his sister, in a terrible voice.

"Your tone does not surprise me. I was greatly shocked myself. '*Nothing more?*' I asked. 'Not a ha'porth, me dear,' said she. 'To tell you the gospel truth, Mr. McGrath, she was mad, poor darling, to put on *something* more, but I stood firm! "Nature or nothing!" I said.' " Mr. McGrath looks sadly round him. "She did really," he says. "Wasn't it awful?"

"*I* know who is awful," says May, with a glance at him from under her half-closed lids. Perhaps she means to be indignant, but unfortunately her voice shakes.

"Funny story for her to tell, wasn't it?" says Owen, thoughtfully. "And of her own daughter, too. After all, I begin to think now, judging by other events, that perhaps she is more to be pitied than blamed. It has occurred to me that (though I felt it my duty to warn you against her), that perhaps I made a mistake. The poor creature may not be so much bad, as *mad*! The change of one letter only, dear May, but 'Oh! the difference to me!'"

"I don't believe you'd see it," says Hilary.

"But how mad, Owen?" asks Mrs. Clarence, who is always on the *qui vive* for gossip of any sort.

"Well, I don't know how it will strike *you*,"—but as I stood beside her, suffering in silence, and trying to believe she did not quite mean what she said about her daughter's costume at her presentation, she said, 'Isn't Madam grand, to-night? Look at her chins! She's always like that when she's got up for the evening. But no wonder when she's got the Riviera on her.' "

"The *what*?"

"Yes. The whole Riviera. A big place, you know. I shouldn't have thought even Madam (and she is, thank heaven, one in a thousand) could hold it up. According to Mrs. Bailey, Atlas isn't in it with her! I felt startled, and looked round for a *crushed* Madam, but there she was at the end of the room (looking sunbeams at Sir Lucien, who was looking thunderclouds at her) as large as life, and as ugly as ever."

"She meant a *rivière*, of course," puts in May, impatiently.

"Ah! how clever you are," says Owen, sadly. "Now that never occurred to *me*, and so perhaps the poor, dear woman is not so very mad after all. A *rivière*! I declare, now I think of it, perhaps she did mean that. But why can't people speak English when they can't speak other things? Tiara would have been good enough for the likes of me. These foreign languages are very confusing!"

"Is tiara English?" says Dolly. "Owen, go and play billiards with May and Gilbert, if"—with a swift smile at Gilbert—"three will not be trumpery."

May's engagement has leaked out, and is now known to all the household. Sir Lucien, who has something to do with it, the engagement coming off in his house, had countenanced it in his own ungracious way.

"Grey! Gilbert Grey! So she's going to marry that idiot! Well, it's for her father to speak of it, but I wish to the deuce she wouldn't call him Gilby! Sounds like that confounded—— *Why* can't she call him by his decent name, as any other Christian might?" Thus he snarled over it.

"Oh, no, no billiards to-night, I'm too tired," says May. "I'd much rather, if I *had* to do anything, go up and see the stars from the tower; you know it is *the* night."

"As you will," says Dolly, languidly. She makes a little artistic pretence at stretching her pretty arms, and, rising, saunters to the window. It is a deep window, enveloped by curtains—crimson, silken. They fall together, hiding her as she goes through them. Outside on the balcony, as she knows, Everard is smoking. Seeing her, he pauses in his saunter to and fro, and comes to her.

"So you have fallen in love with the charming Amber," says she all at once, as he comes up to her—without preliminary of any sort.

A sense of confusion is shown only in his stopping short, and flicking off the ash of his cigar with considerably more caution than usual.

"My dear Dolly! What utter rot!" No one is here to listen, so he can speak to her in the ordinary terms we all use at times, with those intimate with

us. In print it sounds vulgar, but in reality it is—well, it is real.

She subdues the mockery that is in her smile. “Still you are a little *épris*, eh?” She knows it will not serve her design to drive him too far—to compel him to declare his passion for Amber!

“Ah! that’s better,” says he. “Love is a strong word. I confess I think her pretty.”

“That is a *weak* word. She’s lovely!” She decides on giving him a little goad. “I’d go even further if necessary, but I see you do not follow me. But why then do you make such silent love to her? To tease Hilary? Oh! I know there is not much love lost between you two.”

“To tease Hilary!” He repeats her words. “You”—gazing at her scrutinizingly—“have guessed it then?”

She laughs—the easiest, merriest little laugh. In truth she can laugh. Victory comes her way.

“Why not? *Such* a friend as I am—of yours. But if you have a grudge against Hilary, why not put it to the test? He, I *know*, loves Amber, and you——” She laughs again.

“How?” says he.

“Ah! how dull a man can be! Have you forgotten that some stars in their courses may be fighting for you, and your revenge, this very night. Have you seen the papers? The *Cork Constitution* says to-night there will be a brilliant display in the heavens. Ask her to go up and see it—at midnight.” Her merriment conceals the touch of contempt in her tone. The charm of the night—with

the charm of the stars and Amber thrown in—ought to bring matters to a climax!

“*You* tell me to do this!” He is looking at her. It is an old look well known, but now with a chill in it. It hardens her to her task. To get rid of him, to push him out of her life before the return of Colonel Clarence is now her principal desire. There had been, as has been already said, some passages between them—not so very much—but yet enough to make her world talk, and to put him *behind* her, as it were, before Clarence’s return is the dominant thought in Dolly’s frivolous but distinctly careful mind. His present open, if unspoken, admiration of another woman has given her the necessary impetus for the accomplishment of this desire; not that she wanted any sustained effort for it. “All for love and the world well lost,” would be romantic sentiment, regarded by Dolly, as coming under the head of idiocy—Dolly who is of the world worldly, to her very heart’s core.

“Why not?” gaily. Her eyes are well on his. “We have been good friends always, Eustace, eh? And I am not a stupid woman. I like experiments; they interest me, they even amuse me. Of course I know you only want to score off Hilary. Well, let us all go up to the northern tower to-night to see those stars, and”—she has sufficient grace to hesitate here; but after all Amber and Hilary are certainly in love with each other, and it will compromise Everard, and no doubt help to hasten on the events with the lovers—“there is a tower above the room I mean; ask her to go there with you. Not in Hilary’s

hearing, of course. If she goes with you—well, then you take the victory; if she refuses——” She spreads her pretty hands abroad, and laughs up at him.

He is looking down at her with a silent frown.

“Do you know, I don’t understand you,” says he.

“No?” She shrugs her shoulders with an amused air. “You think I ought to be jealous—why should I? You don’t love her, I know that?” She waits with an audacity all her own for his answer, her gaze full on his.

“What a question from you to me,” says he, but his equivocation is very poor. A dusky red covers his face; his eyes fall away from hers. “You spoke”—huskily—“of an experiment, that is all. If I could be certain she was in love with Adare——”

“Or certain she was in love with you? You know it is the uncertainty that makes all games worth the playing.” The light, mocking tone tells him she has guessed his secret. He draws back a little, staring out into the night. In spite of the fresh, strange, mad love that has taken him by storm, and has flooded all his life to the risk of its drowning him—he is conscious of a sense of loss. Dolly, gay, incapable of any deep feeling, inconsequent, worldly, has, in spite of him, held him in bonds, slender always, but firm, until now. And that she should so lightly, so easily let him go! He is essentially a bad man, he has done beyond all dispute a great deal of harm in his time, but he has his good points too, as even the very worst of us have (so cheer up, dear reader!) and he had been good to Dolly in many ways, and

had loved her in some queer fashion, and had helped her out in some of her extremities (Dolly was always in debt), and without demanding the uttermost farthing! Dolly was perhaps the *one* woman he had fancied during his dissolute life—who had taken all, and given—*nothing*. Dolly in her way was clever. And—very heartless!

As he meditates, May runs out to the balcony, and to a chair at the end of it, on which a wrap is lying.

“Whither away, fair maid?” asks he, rousing himself.

“We are going up to the tower to see the stars,” cries she. “They will be lovely to-night. “Gilby”—to Grey, who is in close attendance—“has Amber gone? She said she hated cloaks. Oh! come, Dolly, it will be delicious in the tower, and, after all, I’m not a bit sleepy now!”

“The stars in their courses,” begins Dolly, glancing at Everard, “*are* fighting for you. Come!”

CHAPTER XXV.

“Alas! how easily things go wrong.”

UP here in this old tower the night is magnificent. Stars on stars stud the pale blue firmament, their brilliant lights defying the darkness. One might happily think, although the midnight chimes have rung from the stable clock, that

“Dull-eyed night
Has not as yet begun
To make a seizure of the light,
Or to seal up the sun.”

Even Dolly is a little less vivacious than usual beneath the heavenly beauty of those silent stars swimming above her in the ineffable blue. It may be their mystic charm, or else a faint twinge of conscience that renders her mute—who can say? It would be unfair to judge her on such evidence, as May is very silent, too, and Amber, with arms on the sill of one of the narrow windows, her head uplifted, her large eyes rapt and dreamy, has evidently no word for anyone. Not even for Hilary, who is on her right hand, or for Everard, who is standing on her left.

The little touch of calm that seems to have fallen

on them all is now broken. From outside, from the stone steps leading up to the first room in the old tower comes a yell both loud and deep! Naturally, Mr. McGrath is the owner of it.

"Owen!" says Mrs. Clarence at once, with an air of resignation; "he has evidently fallen on the hard stone steps, coming up in a hurry, and hurt himself." Indeed, a second later, as he stumbles into the room, he tells them so.

"Beastly stairs. Fancy putting stones *inside* a house. Bad enough before the hall door. Well, here I am at last. Not missed, I can see, although I have been fighting your battles down below. But it's no good! Nothing would get our darling Lucien off to his silken couch. He grows livelier every minute. I pressed my best cigars on him—they only made him livelier. I suggested brandy, and he nearly blew my head off. He wants to see *you*, Hilary; I'd advise you to go at once, as he's in one of his tantrums. What are you all doing up here, eh? Mooning?"

Everard casts an involuntary glance at Dolly, whose face is impassive. *Had* she arranged it? And, indeed, perhaps she had. Who could say?

At all events, she does not betray *herself*. Her wonderfully youthful little face, with its lucent eyes of simple blue gazing through the window up to the lustrous stars, is innocent as a babe's of any hidden meaning.

Everard's heart begins to beat quickly. The time has come, with or without Dolly's intervention—Why trifle with it? Five minutes alone with her—

with Amber! A word spoken—a word answered. If she will give herself to him! He jibs a little at this thought, *he*, who, up to this, has sworn against lasting charms of any sort. But this one creature in all the world has caught and held him.

Well! but will she come with him to the room just above this, to gain a clearer view of the lovely stars—that *he* may gain the one star of his life? For the first time in all his self-confident years a sense of diffidence overpowers him, that suddenly changes to a sense of triumph, as Amber readily, happily consents to go farther upwards, by a still narrower staircase, to a still narrower room, to see the wonderful stars more clearly.

Hilary below is caught by Sir Lucien in a discussion about the rents of the lower farms first—and *then*, as to the chances of making Brian Deane tell all he knows of the missing jewels. “He knows everything,” says Sir Lucien. “I don’t believe it,” says Hilary, “he is false all through. He is playing with you,” and so on. Hilary’s manner, in spite of himself, is a little impatient, and he has lost the power to conceal it. His heart is with the lovely Amber upstairs, with the girl who has dragged it out of his breast. This thought delights him. “I have now no heart,” he has told himself a hundred times, glad at his loss. “No heart, but she has given me hers instead. And *what* a heart!” All her grace and sweetness comes to him now, threefold, as he sits listening to Sir Lucien’s violent diatribes against her mother and her detested father.

As he saw her last looking up to the stars, her

pretty elbows on the window-sill, how dear she was. Truth and beauty lay in her eyes. Ah! that is her principal charm. Truth! But beauty *is* truth! And what a lovely nature is hers!

“She cannot hide her gentleness,
The happy smile, the looks that bless,
The face that’s like a flower to see,
The lovely dimples in her arms,
The whispered words that act as charms
To keep away all wanton harms,
When witches haunt the upland free.”

* * * * *

Poor Amber! she has need of many witches to keep away the many harms that are following her to-night, had he only known it! Breaking free at last from Sir Lucien, he rises, and, with a haste that I am afraid can hardly be called decent, leaves the room.

Now, with mad haste in his steps, he rushes up the broad staircase from the hall, eager to reach again that room in the old tower where he had last seen his beloved gazing with rapt eyes upon the stars.

The room is empty. No Amber is here now. No one is here—it is swept clear of any living thing. Dolly indeed had been careful to carry off all the others downstairs, when she saw Amber and Everard go towards the tiny stairs that led to the very top of the tower.

Something, he cannot define, strikes cold to Hilary’s heart, as he stands on the threshold of the empty room. She had not waited! It was the one, the first thought. It was senseless—absurd; how

could she wait, if all the others went? but still . . . She had not waited.

He turns to retrace his steps. If not here, then perhaps in the drawing-room. It is late, however, and no doubt once having abandoned their desire for the stars, they—the women—had all gone to their rooms. Slowly he goes downwards, and reaching the gallery that runs round part of the house, walks slowly towards a back staircase that leads to the halls beneath.

He has gone half-way when a slight sound in the distance behind him brings him to a full stop.

Steps! Steps surely! He turns, and through the darkness—Sir Lucien's economical mind has ordered lights out at eleven o'clock sharp every night—through the darkness lit only by the moon, that now is riding gloriously in the heavens outside, his eyes rest instinctively upon the stone steps that lead to the tower.

A moment he waits—his heart beating madly—a *moment* (is it a year? a thousand years?), and now through the mists of night, and the strange shadows of it, and the faint rays rushing through the central windows, he sees two forms come slowly forward.

They pause. One—it is Amber (in the clear light of this unhappy night he can see her face)—leans slightly forward. Some words fall from her lips. Her companion—Everard, beyond doubt—answers her. Another moment—in which Hilary tells himself he is going mad—and then——

Everard has taken her hand, has raised it to his lips, *she consenting!* A fervent, a passionate caress

on the back of that small brown hand, and Everard goes down the principal staircase, leaving her still standing in the full moonlight gazing after him.

Adare can see her face perfectly. Beyond doubt there is intense feeling in it—for *him*—for Everard!

The fact that Amber is *now* coming his way, across the unlit gallery, fails to check the devil that is raging in his breast. Ah! last night. How he had admired her then, mad fool that he was, because of her determination not to marry him until her father's name was cleared! She had not waited to clear her father's memory before accepting Everard. What a dupe he has been! It was a mere put off to him, until she could make sure of Everard, and his immense fortune. And he had believed in her; he would have staked his soul on her truth.

Nearer, nearer came the footsteps. Quite in the shadow himself, he can watch her as she approaches, without being seen himself. A cold hateful disbelief in all things—in every one—has seized upon him, taking place of his late mad rage. As she gets within two yards of him he steps forward.

"Oh, *you*, Hilary!" cries she with a little throb of joyous surprise in her soft voice.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“Ah, yet would God this flesh of mine might be
Where air might wash, and long leaves cover me,
Where tides of grass break into foam of flowers,
Or where the wind’s feet shine along the sea.”

ADARE is silent. This sweet call to him but embitters the desolation of his soul. Oh! lovely hypocrite! And what has he to say to her? How can he speak, knowing his heart is broken? His silence touches once at the nerves that are already so unstrung.

“Hilary. *Why* don’t you speak? Are you angry with me? I could not help it. I did not mean——” Her thoughts fly to the upper chamber, where the everlasting stars looked down upon her, and where beneath their light she had said “No” to Everard’s proposal of marriage. Is it that? Should she not have gone there? But they all saw her go, and said nothing! How has she offended him? The pretty colour dies away from her half-parted lips.

“‘Qui s’excuse, s’accuse!’” The words fall from him with a bitter smile. “However, I know I have no right to dictate to you what you should or should not do. And as for being angry, why should I be angry? We are all free to do as we will. If you

think my manner severe, it is merely that I would suggest to you, as being one of my family, that at such an hour as this you——” He stops.

“Should not be here,” interrupts she eagerly. “Yes, I know, *now*. But they were all here a moment ago.”

“A moment! Your moments seem to have flown on wings”—still with that cruel smile—“in the room up there with Everard.”

“Hilary! Oh! it is *impossible!*” in a low, intensely vivid voice. “You *must* know how it was.”

“You are right—I do!”

“You are mad!” cries the girl with a little indignant gesture. “You don’t understand. You left me to go down to Sir Lucien—you remember?”

“Certainly. It gave a splendid opportunity.” A pause.

“I never thought of you before as contemptible,” says she. Her voice now is quite changed. All the sweetness, the love, the dearness of it, seems dead, killed! “But I have often heard it is difficult to know anyone. Believe me or not, as you will, however. I went up there to see the stars with Mr. Everard; they could be seen more clearly there, and——”

Adare breaks into a low, unpleasant laugh.

“Why give yourself so much trouble?” says he. “Why not let this very amusing game you have played with him and me come to an end now—so far as *I* am concerned, at all events?” Grief and wrath have rendered him quite incapable of fathoming the wretched things he is saying.

Amber's eyes, resting on his, grow larger and brighter, but her face is the colour of death.

"I don't think you know what you are saying," says she, coldly.

"Ah! Don't let it degenerate into a farce!" Adare's sneer is abominable.

"A farce!" she breathes quickly. What is it? Ah! how *well* she knows what it is! But is it all *really* over? A little clutch at her heart, that is sometimes called despair, seems to choke her for a moment.

"You mean our engagement," says she presently, having gathered up her courage with a wonderful strength. "There was none, however. *That*, at least, you must remember. And—I am glad of it now! I"—her lovely eyes flashing fire into his, her whole air filled with ineffable contempt—"I am *thankful* that there is no real bond between me and—you." The sweet, deep eyes, so angry, so troubled in their depths, are still fastened upon his. Scorn lies in their depths.

"This is a convenient occasion for you to get rid of me," says Adare, calmly. "When a woman trifles with two men it is well for her to have just cause for getting rid, at the last, of the one who is the least desirable. I congratulate you on your success. You have not only got rid of me without any scandal, but you have secured Everard, who is beyond doubt the richer man of the two."

The girl turns upon him sharply.

"I wish I were a man!" says she, slowly, her nostrils dilating.

"I would to God you were!" cries he, "for then I'd kill you——" There is such frightful passion in his tone that involuntarily she draws back. "Amber! What a name for you!—for *you*!" His desperate grief makes him brutal. "Why did your father give you such a name as that?"

"Why should he not?" She lifts her small, beautiful head and smiles at him defiantly. "It was, however, my mother's suggestion; but afterwards my father said it quite suited me. Because"—her defiance now is of the very highest order—"he said I looked so clear!"

"Clear! You! And to deceive me so! To go up there to-night"—pointing to the tiny staircase that leads to the topmost room of the tower—"with Everard!"

"I don't understand about Mr. Everard! You and yours have received him as a friend, I think, during my stay here. Yet now you talk of him as if—— But"—with a scornful gesture—"I care very little for Mr. Everard. As to my mother's naming me Amber, she thought of my complexion then, I think, not of my heart! You see"—scoffingly—"it was almost transparent when I was born! As for what it is now—or my heart either——" She shrugs her shoulders. A very agony of rage has caught and overwhelmed her. Let all the good of life go by for the sake of a moment's revenge upon this one human being, whom, of all the world, she has learned to love.

Her air, her attitude enrages him.

"How dare you speak to me like that?" cries he,

catching her suddenly by both shoulders and holding her as if in a vice.

"*Let me go!*" Her voice rings clear, if low, and without a touch of fear in it. She swings herself sharply out of his grasp, and at once walks towards the staircase beyond.

It is done very quickly, but she has hardly reached the middle part of the gallery when he is beside her. His face is still dark with anger and distrust, but—he has followed her.

"Amber. Don't go! *Was* I, or was I *not* mad to speak to you like that?"

"To"—coldly—"think of me like that!"

"I think so still. How *can* I think otherwise, unless—— Perhaps a devil had me then," he cries, passionately. "But if you will speak—will explain——"

"I shall not explain." Her face is as white as death.

"You refuse me one word." He has fallen on his knees before her. What is anything to him—all the world contains—save this one little slender girl!

Deliberately she loosens his fingers from her gown.

"Even one," she says.

He regains his feet slowly, very slowly; so slowly, indeed, that it gives Sir Lucien, who is coming up the gallery at this late hour, sufficient time to see him on his knees before her.

"Ha!" cries he, hurrying up and speaking before reaching them. His voice, harsh and resonant, rings along the gallery. "So I have found you out at

last! Great heavens, Hilary!—are you dead to *all* your interests? *Marry that girl*”—pointing to Amber with a quivering forefinger, that suggests a venomous and a lifelong hatred—“and not one penny of mine shall ever be yours. As for you!”—he turns to Amber a face black with passion—“I regret I ever let my niece invite you here—to-morrow you shall——”

As if struck dumb by some strength greater than his own, he stops. Amber has made a gesture, an imperious one—the gesture of a wounded queen. Her large dark eyes are flashing, her nostrils dilated. She will not *permit him* to finish that insult!

“To-morrow I leave your house,” she says. She takes a step towards him, and Sir Lucien, as if cowed by the grandeur of her air, steps back a little. There is indeed something splendid in the scorn of her young face. “And before going I beg you to understand that I have no desire whatsoever to marry”—she casts a glance that withers him, at Hilary—“Captain Adare. He is indeed the last man in the *world* I should care to marry!”

She turns, and flinging up her head with a superb gesture—without another word, another glance, goes swiftly, yet without undue haste, to the staircase that leads out of the gallery.

Adare, his very soul on fire, turns to go after her. Sir Lucien catches his arm.

“Stay! I command you!” cries he. “Let that impertinent girl go. . . . Hilary——” As the young man flings his detaining hand aside. “Consider! If you disobey me now, I shall disinherit you, and a

title—without money. Give her up, boy, give her up, I say! or I swear——”

“Damnation, sir!” cries Hilary, flinging aside the hand that again had been laid upon his arm. “Do you think *your* money—do you think all the money the world contains, could be as good in my eyes as she is?”

He almost pushes Sir Lucien aside and dashes down the staircase—the staircase that has swallowed up Amber. But he is too late to overtake her. He is only in time indeed to hear the click of the key in her bedroom door.

He turns away. Well! There is still to-morrow! He will see her to-morrow!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

“Every one is the son of his own works.”

BUT the morning proves him wrong. Amber is no longer within the walls of Carrig. When she had gone, or how, no one knows. And to all his grief and self-denunciation is added the knowledge that she must have walked all the way from Carrig, either to Madam's, where she was respected, or to the Old Mill House. In what cruel haste she had been to knock their dust from off her feet!

May applied to, knows nothing, and is indeed greatly distressed. Shall she drive over to the Mill House and see? No, he would not hear of that. There was indeed a latent thought in his mind that had much to do with driving over himself, and—— But it would be useless, he knew, he felt——and yet—— A vehement desire (not to be controlled) to revisit the old mill, the place where first he had seen her, is tearing at his heart-strings.

Dolly had kept her eyes upon him during breakfast. She had come to that uncongenial meal for once, and had, from that study of fifty minutes, drawn very valuable conclusions. She had not confined her attentions, however, to Hilary alone. He but helped to the conclusions at which she

arrived on seeing Everard, who did not come down until it was time for fresh coffee and eggs to be ordered. One glance at him, one at Hilary, who rose as the other entered, and the knowledge that Amber had left the Castle, told Dolly all that she wanted to know.

It is with a smile she glances at Everard now, as by chance he comes into the library an hour later. It is but the merest movement of her lips, but it compels him to come forward. She knows he would have withdrawn if he could, in any common decency.

"So glad," says she. "I have been waiting to see you quite a long time. Come here"—patting the seat beside her—"and have it out with me. So you proposed to her last night, and"—with an uncontrollable little laugh—"she refused you?"

"Straight!" says he, with a shrug. It is, perhaps, a relief to him that she should know, though her manner of taking it causes a stab to his vanity, and perhaps something deeper.

"Ah!" says Dolly. The syllable is a little drawn out, but the smile remains. "And yet you protested to me you were not in love with her. Remember?"

"To my cost." His tone now is gloomy.

"You *really* asked her, then?" Dolly, who is enjoying herself, puts on a burlesque air of being deeply hurt. "O—h! Eustace! And after all the swearings!" He cannot resist a laugh, whilst it occurs to him that as a music hall artiste Dolly would have had a great career before her. The impression grows even deeper when she suddenly breaks out in quite a new direction without a second's warning. "I

knew," cries she, sharply, "in spite of all you said, that you were in love with her. Your nose—your eyes—your mouth betrayed you. Of course, Eustace"—with a dramatic little sigh—"this is the end of our friendship."

"What nonsense, Dolly!" He takes a step towards her. That she should give him up—the small, volatile, but amusing friend of five years!

"I don't know what you mean by nonsense!" Her face is a picture. "But to have a man dangling after me, to be for ever comparing me unfavorably with *Another!* Mark the big capital!"

All at once, with this new absurd little pouting mood upon her, her charm with Everard grows afresh. An actress who in her own line might have achieved distinction, she now takes in Everard, who is supposed by his intimates to be an authority on such silly subjects as women.

"Do you mean that you are jealous?" He catches her hands. The idea of getting away from it all, and with this vivacious companion: away from this new pain at his heart, and with Dolly, who has been a tried *camarade* for years, attracts him: "If I thought *that!* But even in the first days you would not listen to me: Well, *now* will you? Your husband's a brute! That girl was a devil that tempted me. For you I'll give up everything—leave all behind me."

"Even me!" says Dolly. "How unkind. And are you really going to the Antipodes, then? There, don't grow furious, Eustace, of course I know what you mean. But you see *I* should have to give up everything, too! To leave all behind me, and for a

man in love with someone else. What folly it would be! For you and for me. There! don't think me ungrateful either"—her voice gaining a careful gentleness—"you have been very good to me, very often, and—I am not likely to forget it."

Indeed he *had* been good to her in his own queer way, and—a strange thing in his relations with women—without a vestige of return beyond her bare saucy friendship with him—which laid her open to many animadversions from her world but was of a very pleasant nature to him. She soothed him when others ruffled, she laughed when others stormed. She had become almost a necessity. And now one turn of the dice had undone him. For his whimsical, mad longing for a child who scouted him, he had forfeited a most desired friendship. Of course he never knew that Dolly herself had determined on the breach between them.

People had whispered only, but Dolly had heard. She had an acute ear for her friend's whisperings. She kept always a very clear head on her shoulders. And now, when the decision lay with her of getting rid of Everard before her husband's return (and in a way that should prove him in love with *another* woman), she cautiously put him behind her—in spite of the fact that for many years, when Fate and her husband had been against her, *he* had been for her.

He—the libertine of many seasons! A man of pronounced fast proclivities. Yet he had stood to Dolly when friends grew scarce—as money dwindled. He had lent her sums innumerable (he was very rich), without, as has been said, any hope of reward. Had

pulled her (the world kept quite in ignorance of these hidden transactions—so hidden by Everard as to be impossible of knowledge) out of many mires, and left her firmly fixed on dry and pleasant ground. So he had done by her in spite of the tales of his life, that if told would scarcely redound to his credit! and certainly he had strewed the path of the now most ungrateful Dolly with many a rose—and not a single one paid for.

“What do you mean?” says he, staring at her.

“Not so very much. You see”—she has the grace to colour faintly—“Colonel Clarence is coming home.”

“Ah!” His voice has meaning.

“Don’t be odious! Do you suppose I am looking forward to it? He *is* coming, however. And——”

“I see.”

“Oh! You can’t see as much as I can! But—— Well, he will come, and—— You have done a good deal for me before, Eustace—but now——! If you will not keep out of the way when he comes back——? You see, you understand? And when you *are* in love with Amber, it will be so simple.”

Everard, staring at her, gives way to a slight but curious burst of laughter.

“Oh, you can laugh,” says she, frowning. “But you promise, eh! And whatever I say in town—whatever I write to his sister, Lady Droone, you will not contradict? It is nothing to *you*”—with the old glance. It is——”

“Death to you—like the poor frog? So be it. I am to swear I was madly in love with an Irish

maiden of——” He pauses, his eyes flash—he tells himself his turn is coming now. “I shall not call her of equivocal birth,” says he. “I shall call her a queen in her own right; a queen of Beauty.” He stares hard at Dolly. This tribute to her rival’s charms should touch her.

“Yes. Yes. Do. Capital!” cries Dolly, whose only thought is that “the people at home” should lose sight of her philanderings with Everard before the colonel’s return. Else the colonel, between whom and herself very little love is lost, might stop even the meagre allowance he bestows upon her.

“Pile it up!” cries she, so excited that she does not even notice the strange piercing glance of Everard. “Make all you can of it. Let them be perfectly certain you were in love with that fool of a girl. As you *were*”—eagerly, nodding her dainty, but now determined little head at him—“as you were! I could swear to it. *And I will!*”

Everard steps out of the window, and so to the terrace and the yard, to hasten up the groom who is to take him to the station. The taste of Dead Sea fruit lies in his mouth! He had hoped for Amber! He could have sworn by Dolly! And now he stands here—alone! He whom all the world had known as conqueror.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ Things ill got have very bad success.”

How Hilary spends the hours after his first certain knowledge of Amber's going from Carrig, he himself never knows to the end of all. But when this short and dying day is drifting into a long and chilly night, he suddenly goes into the yard and orders a trap to be got ready for him.

“ A groom, sir ?”

“ No. No groom.” He will go alone and unattended. He drives, now calmly, now furiously as the moment takes him, on the road towards that old mill, where first he had seen the girl who had made his life first a heaven, and then a hell to him.

Coming to that part of the road that leads up to the boreen, where Amber's little sick boy dwells, he springs to the ground and leads the horse up the lane, and there gives the poor woman, who remembers him with the most devout gratitude (judging by the prayers she showers upon him), his horse and trap in charge.

Not until he has left her (her honest prayers still echoing at his back) does his brain clear sufficiently to let him know why he is here at all—now—at this hour.

It is to go down there to the old mill—where he first saw her, to his great undoing!—to revisit, *unknown* by anyone, the spot that shall always be to him the very dearest upon earth!

Was he mad last night when he hurled his miserable insults on her? *Surely* he was mad! What did it all come to after all? A few moments spent alone with that devil Everard. He had thought her wrong there; but he—was it not *he* who had been hideously in the wrong? He who had accused her of falsity—falsity to him—to the man she had said she loved! Certainly she had gone to see the stars with Everard, but that was only a small fault, magnified by him—not a crime.

“She hath few faults when all is told,
If she hath one; and young and old
Extol her grace and say of her—
She’s made of sunbeams and of flowers,
And dews and dawns and happy hours,
And music breathed in Eden’s bowers
When angels play the dulcimer.”

Stolidly—self-reproachfully he goes with quick, yet wretched strides towards that old broken mill where first he saw her; his whole soul full of her, and of her lovely, gracious presence.

As he nears the mill a little spark from the lowest depth around it catches his eye. He blinks—stares again. Yet surely there is a light, and in that dismal cellar where he and Amber had buried her rings, that night! His heart begins to beat. She has not gone to Madam’s, then? Poor darling! He had

been nothing but a grief to her from almost their first acquaintance. But a light there? Could she be the one who had lit it? And why come there, into the very bowels of the earth, as it were, at this dark hour?

An unworthy thought—dismissed instantly with a touch of self-horror—that she is here to regain those rings, sends him flying down the slope that leads to the old mill. More likely—*far* more likely—she has come there thinking of it as the last place in the old mill that she had visited with him. If there seems to be conceit or vanity of any sort in this thought of his it must be combated by the fact that he judges her as he judges himself. Has he not come here to-night to look his last on scenes made sacred to him by *her*?

And if she is here? If he should be so wildly fortunate as to find her here—in that melancholy vault—then in his very body he can prostrate himself before her. Can lay his apologies at her feet. Can own to her his grief—his hatred of himself, and—heaven is good as well as just—gain her forgiveness.

He covers the ground between him and the old mill in an extraordinarily swift time, and gaining the dilapidated doorway, steps quickly in, and to that hole in the broken flooring that leads to the cellar beneath. Very softly he steps. He must not take her off her guard. To startle her by a sudden descent would be a cowardly thing—taking her by storm, as it were. And yet to seem to spy upon her!

He shrinks from the thought, and finally decides on looking through the hole in the floor from which the old ladder is hanging, and seeing her, call to her; telling her he is here—has come—— Oh! Too poor! Too poor! Telling her rather that he is here, her *slave*—her *lover* for life, even though she should elect to despise and reject him!

He bends down—his eyes traverse the vault. A sharp exclamation almost escapes him. *Almost*—not quite!

Down here in this dismal cellar Deane is kneeling beside a wide opening in the earthen floor. This opening is close to the wall, and *on* the wall just above it is painted that small black arrow, of which Amber and he had taken such notice. On the side of this opening lies an old and very large jewel case—very old, and now very grimy—its lid lifted. Hilary gazing, too astonished to move, can see in the faint light of the lantern Deane has laid beside it great rays of light flashing. The missing jewels at last! Good heavens! How near the discovery of them he and Amber had been when they buried those rings, only an inch or two this way—and . . .

Lightly he drops to the ground. So lightly, indeed, that the other man, engrossed with his spoil, hears nothing of his coming, until he is almost at his elbow.

Then!

With a frantic yell, as of a wild beast torn from its prey, Deane springs to his feet, and having faced Adare for the fraction of a second, flings himself upon him.

The latter grasps him in turn. Disgust and rage are giving fresh strength to thews and sinews, that require little assistance from any source. And for a few minutes the two men sway and wrestle and are locked in a deadly embrace that means death—for one or the other! Nostrils dilated—lips parted—a sway to the right—victory for one—a sway to the left—victory to the other! How will it end?

Now a slight chance in this wild wrestling match—a loosening of the arms of Hilary—gives Deane a chance; he flings Hilary from him, and with lightning speed draws a revolver from his breast!

With a low growl of joy he levels it.

A second! a second only! and then——

But there is life in a second, even for a man condemned. And it is a girl—the girl he loves—who gives life to Hilary! A small hand, brown, but shapely, flings up the fatal revolver, that would have sent him to a land very far away from ours, and a bullet crashes into the rotten rafters above their heads. The revolver has taken a voyage very nearly as high:—It comes down now in a distant corner, and providentially does not go off. Amber with a little spring goes to it, and picks it up.

“You—you—*you devil!*” says Deane, turning his eyes, now gleaming with actual madness, upon Amber. “Ah! I did not mistake you. A devil! a devil!” He is muttering evidently now, but all at once his mind seems to clear. “A devil I love!” cries he, fiercely. “And I’ll have you yet!”

“Go home, Brian,” says the girl, very gently, and in a very low voice. Her fingers tighten over

the revolver, however. She is calm, but looks a little broken. Adare moves to her side.

"Those stones, those ornaments," says he, pointing to them, "belong, as of course you know, to Sir Lucien Adare. In his name I take possession of them! As for you"—he looks straight at Deane with scorn and undisguised contempt—"I give you just twenty-four hours to get out of the country."

"I shan't give you half that time to live," says Deane. His glance is demoniacal; he rushes to the ladder and swings himself out of sight.

Amber turns to Hilary with an almost frantic gesture.

"Go," cries she. Go *quickly*! He has gone to the house and can be back in a quarter of an hour. He has another revolver."

"Give me that one," says Hilary.

"Take it, but"—vehemently—"go."

"Well, come!" says he.

She stares at him, her face growing, if possible, whiter. She shakes her head.

"Never mind me. But go, you, and at once."

"And leave you here?" he laughs, shortly.

"I am safe enough, believe me. Quite"—with a curiously strained smile, that in spite of all her efforts to suppress it, betrays the actual fear she is enduring, not only for him, but for herself—"quite safe."

"In the hands of that brute? Don't let us waste time, Amber. No, not another word. You come with me—or I don't go!"

He has all this time been busy, digging farther in from the already open hole to where she and he had

buried her rings that other day, that now seems a century away. Coming at last on the handkerchief in which they lie, he pulls it out with the rings folded within it, and thrusts it into his breast pocket, and fills some of his other pockets with the strings of shining necklaces, pendants, and earrings that lie in that old and battered jewel case. One tiara of extraordinary beauty he gives to her to keep, with some of the unmounted stones that are of greater value than the rest. "To think that her father and mother were so wretchedly poor and yet never sold them," is his one great and surprising thought. There had been honour even in her butterfly of a mother. To carry away the jewel case is impossible, but an old and damp bit of paper lying amongst the shining stones he puts away carefully. There is indeed no time to read it—no time for anything. Deane may be back at any moment.

"Come," says he, catching her hand and drawing her towards the ladder.

"But where?" shrinking backwards.

"To Carrig, of course."

"Oh! impossible. *I will* not! To meet Sir Lucien again!" She flings up her head with a touch of the deepest pride and resentment. "Last night"—haughtily—"he *all but* ordered me out of his house."

"Why think of him?" angrily. "Is he worth one of your thoughts. Besides, you need not see him. Dolly, May will receive you with open arms. And to-morrow you can go to Madam's if you will." He is speaking sharply—hurriedly in disjointed sen-

tences. There is so little time, and to be caught like rats in a trap! Still she hesitates.

"Look," cries he passionately, "I know I have forfeited the right even to speak to you, but I implore you to listen to me now."

"I cannot go," says she, faintly. "But you——"

"Ah! As for that!—Well—we stay, then," says he, with a sudden calm decision. "But stand back here, you will be more out of the way when he fires."

A shudder runs through her.

"Oh! no, no! Oh! *must* I go?" She bursts into tears, but takes a step towards the ladder. That "*we* stay, then" has struck cold to her heart. Is she to be the one to kill him? For if he stays, there will be murder to-night—she had seen it in Brian's eyes—"the murder of one or the other; and loving fear lends certainty to the awful thought, that it will be Hilary who will be the victim. For one thing, Hilary would fight fairly and above-board—as for Brian—— Already he must have gained the house; and in a few minutes more——"

With a gasp she runs to the ladder.

"I will go with you," cries she, and with flying steps rushes upwards to the open air, that strikes cold but full of hope upon her pallid face. It is now *she* indeed who is in mad haste to be gone. Catching his hand, she runs by little paths unknown to him—by small, short cuts, invaluable in a moment like this—through grasses wet with the chill dew of night—beneath the cold glimmering of the silent stars—across the road and up the breen, where they find the dog-cart waiting for them.

A word to the woman, a coin slipped into her grateful hand, a quick spring into the trap, and they are driving down the lane, and presently up the road at a rattling pace.

Hilary's heart is beginning to beat high with renewed hope and joy; his beloved is beside him, and with her the missing jewels that will win Sir Lucien's consent to—— Well—it is too soon to think of that; she may not be able to forgive. But although no words have passed between them—no “making up,” as the children call it, still——

Great Heavens! What is that?

CHAPTER XXIX.

“Night falls like fire; the heavy lights run low.”

ONLY a man running stealthily, swiftly across a field!

The moon has come from behind a cloud, and is flooding all the land with its radiance. Every object is for the moment discernible. And Hilary, his senses all alive, knows that the man is Deane. He is hidden now behind some heavy furze bushes—and now again can be seen, keeping in the shadow as much as possible, but still visible to the clear eyes watching. Now he is lost again, and now the breaking of a branch on the quiet air tells Hilary he is a little ahead of him. He had run obliquely across the fields, so as to overtake them, and behind that low wall over there he is crouching—waiting. There is a gap just there—he will fire when the cart comes abreast of it. As clearly as possible Hilary sees it all, and his heart grows sick as he thinks of Amber. To go back is impossible—to turn the mare's head would be the signal for the other to shoot one or the other of them—they are, indeed, too close for retreat. There is nothing for it but to lash the mare to redoubled speed, and to have the revolver ready. They are *at* the gap now, and at this moment a dark

figure rises from behind the wall, and deliberately raises an arm. There is a glint of steel in the moonlight. Adare, clutching Amber, drags her from her seat to her knees, on the floor of the dog-cart, holding her there with cruel force. No doubt this sudden action of his, meant to save *her* life, saves also his own.

A whiz of a bullet over their heads—a flash, a thud of metal against the stone wall opposite—a frantic dash forward of the frightened mare, and——

They are safe. The good mare, tearing along on the road to Carrig, is now getting slightly under control again, aided by Hilary's hand and voice. The one danger past, he had had to encounter the other, but a runaway horse seemed child's play to him when he knew that Amber was safe, alive, unhurt. Brave and darling girl! She had not even fainted. He had spoken to her, "You are not hurt, my darling?" and she had answered, "No," but had begged to stay where she was for the moment, as if movement was impossible to her. And with his hands full—a terrified and spirited mare being of no small count—he had let her rest there on the floor of the cart, with her dear and beautiful head against his knee.

Now, however, the good little mare has grown reasonable again, and Amber, almost without help, raises herself to the seat beside him.

"It won't be very long now," says he, quietly, encouragingly. Not that she wants courage, his brave and beautiful girl! With a miserable anger directed against himself, he remembers again all his past sins

against her—his cruel surmises, his contemptible suspicions. Here on this lonely road, with nothing to break the silence but the sound of the horse's hoofs upon the ground, the kind and thoughtful night is making all things even more clear to him—is showing him in rich colours the sweetness and truth of the lovely nature of the girl he loves. The night is a great purifier! It gives us time and pause, if often terrible pain.

He would have spoken to her now, when they have reached the lower road, and no impediment can lie between them and Carrig. Would have poured out to her words of desperate apology, of heartfelt grief and love, but something in her stillness checks him. Not here. Not now. It would be to take her at a disadvantage. In spite of the wonderful spirit that has kept her up so long, and that has forbidden her to utter one cry of fear during all the terrible incidents of this horrible night, he can see that she is tired, exhausted, even to the point of fainting.

* * * * *

She revives, however, as they reach the hall at Carrig, and Hilary having given her into the astonished but very friendly hands of May and Dolly (the latter having *used* her, no longer desiring to *abuse* her), he goes straight to the library, where one of the men tells him Sir Lucien is to be found.

“Well, I have found the missing heirlooms,” says he at once, not calculating the result.

Sir Lucien, with a wild exclamation, rushes at him, his lean old hands trembling, his dull eyes on fire.

“*Found* them, boy? Found them? That Deane

—that fellow—he has given them up. She has consented then? Ha! I knew she would. Bad—bad, like her mother——”

“Be silent!” says the young man, with such a cold force as checks the hideous, almost insane excitement on Sir Lucien’s face. “Have you forgotten everything—that it is of your own sister you speak—that she is *dead*?”

“No doubt,” says Sir Lucien, with a sudden attempt at his old dignity, “I spoke too hastily—without sufficient thought——”

Adare stares straight at him.

“I must ask you as well to think more carefully when next speaking of your *niece*.” His face is set and hard.

“Of course. Of course. I see,” says Sir Lucien, drumming on the table with quite a pitiful agitation. “As you will. But”—rising and coming towards Hilary with his form bent in a miserly eagerness—“the jewels! The missing stones—where are they?” Involuntarily the old white aristocratic hands go out, as if to clutch the man before him, then are drawn back, the fingers of one beating in a sort of frenzy against the knuckles of the other. “Where are they, boy?”

“I have them,” coldly.

“You—you! *Here*?” The fingers now are clawing the air, and all at once they seize on Hilary’s coat. “They are mine! They are mine! Give them up—give them up, I say,” shrieks Sir Lucien. “Would *you* be a robber too?”

All at once the fingers slacken, and he would have

fallen backwards, but that Hilary, catching him in time, presses him gently into the arm-chair behind him. His face looks so old and yellow, and the eyes so dull, that the younger man in haste pours out a glass of wine from the decanter on the small table in the window, and presses him to take it.

"Pray, try to control yourself, sir," says he, as he sees Sir Lucien slowly revive, and show the keenest interest again in the missing stones in spite of that sharp tussle with death a moment since. "There is no occasion for this extreme excitement." His tone is studiously courteous, yet it is impossible to altogether control the disgust that is coursing through every vein. "I have the stones. They are quite safe, and they are yours. I have risked my life to get them, and the life of one far dearer than myself. I can lay them on the table before you now, this moment—but I think I am entitled to some reward."

"Say it. Name it. Anything!" cries Sir Lucien, in a low faint tone. "It is granted."

"Your consent to my marriage with Amber—with your niece!"

Sir Lucien breaks into a low chuckle.

"*Only* that! Who cares about that?"

"Still, I want your word," says the young man, slowly. "I know if you once give it, you will never break it." And, indeed, in this, to do Sir Lucien only bare justice, he understands him rightly. The other night, you may remember, you threatened, if I married her, to disinherit me. I should care little about that for myself, but I owe *her* a great deal—a great deal more than I can ever pay." He pauses

—a sigh bursts from his throat. He is demanding permission to marry her, to bestow all his worldly wealth upon her, but—will she ever listen to him again? Will she accept his gifts? “For her sake I ask your open consent to our marriage.”

“Marry her. Marry her,” impatiently.

“You have *no* objection?”

“None. None,” feverishly. If it comes to that, I like the girl. She has courage, pride, and she has flouted that damned Deane. She has a look of the Adares, too. Is that all?”

“All,” says Hilary. He moves closer to the library table, and deliberately proceeds to empty his pockets on it.

At first, as if bound by some sense of decency, Sir Lucien remains silent, if trembling, as each exquisite ornament is laid down. But when the glittering mass of priceless stones reaches its end, he gives way to a shout of triumph and almost flings himself upon them.

“At last! At last!” he cries. And like one possessed, he begins to count them.

No need to go to the old inventory in the drawer over there; he knows by heart how many there ought to be of all the necklets and bracelets, rings, and quaint old ornaments—many of them, in these more modern days, out of use and in want of a fresh setting.

Suddenly he turns round with a fierce exclamation to Hilary.

“The tiara!”

Hilary remembering, and, indeed, feeling a little shocked at his forgetfulness, thrusts his hand into a

side pocket and draws out the forgotten thing that Amber had given him at the hall door and hands it to Sir Lucien, who falls upon it rapturously.

With the shining tiara, Hilary has pulled out the bit of soiled and ragged paper that he had found in the old jewel case.

Leaning towards the lamp, he runs his eyes over the now rather illegible page. He notices that on the left hand corner a tiny arrow is marked.

“Thursday! *Such* a Thursday!

“This is from me, Thomas O’Connell, to you, my beloved in heaven! To-night, that sees you there, I write it, to tell you that your last request to me has been carried out. May God forgive me if I err. But all things I risk for you. The jewels are safe, your brother will never find them. May God forgive him, too, though you and I did not. Are you listening, my only dear?”

Such an absurd little document, yet with what terrible, what wretched sincerity in it. Something that might be called moisture has clouded Hilary’s eyes. Poor unhappy Thomas O’Connell. He pauses. Perhaps, after all—*happy* Thomas O’Connell. He had suffered for her, he had committed what most men would call a crime for her, but he had *loved* her. And to much love, much is forgiven.

Here Hilary’s thoughts take a side curve. The man had sinned, beyond doubt, in giving that promise to his wife in her dying hour—in hiding the jewels; but he had not sold them, even when money seemed very desirable. And strange, far stranger than *his* sense of honesty was *hers*—Amber’s mother, the sister of Sir Lucien, the wife of Thomas O’Connell. In all her wild wanderings, from Dublin to London,

from London to Paris and back again, she, who had been accustomed to money and its uses all her life, who must have suffered intensely from the want of it, had still held intact the family jewels that her father, in a fit of wanton folly, had entrusted to her care.

Of such beings was Amber born, and in truth, honour must be her heritage.

It is at this point of his meditations that, drawing himself up with a great pride in the knowledge of this splendid, if a little barren, inheritance of his beloved, he feels something hard lying against his ribs. Quickly he pulls out a handkerchief that contains the rings he had so ruthlessly begged her to forego, and that he and she had buried out of sight, within an inch of the lost treasure, some weeks ago.

"These, too," says he to Sir Lucien, who for the last few minutes has been running his fingers over the recovered jewels, as if a little doubtful.

"Ha! That just makes it up," cries Sir Lucien, stretching out his hand to seize them; "I only wanted them to make up the complete total."

"I want them, too," says Hilary, smiling.

"Those?"

"Yes, these! Come, Sir Lucien, you owe me something, surely."

"I've paid my debt—I've given my consent to your marriage."

"Ah! That was the great concession. But"—he points to the glittering gems on the table, and back to the rings in his hand—"these are a mere trifle out of your store, and"—with a direct glance at his uncle—"I want them for Amber."

“Well”—grudgingly—“take them. Though no girl is worth them. And remember, too, no further wedding present from me!”

* * * * *

Hilary, reaching the hall outside, stands for a moment thinking of what he shall do next. To go to the drawing-room, to chance saying a word to her in private there, seems impossible. No! a *chance* word, when all his heart must be outpoured. . . . His soul revolts from it, yet, how to see her. How to explain. How to get the absolution that, if refused, will mean the end of all things to him.

In his turmoil and distress, standing here in the open hall, Fate favours him and comes to his rescue.

Gilbert Grey, hurrying with swift steps down the staircase, runs almost into his arms.

“My dear fellow, well met,” says Hilary. “Are you going to the drawing-room? If so, will you tell Amber that I should like to—that is—er—ask her will she see me in the—the dining-room—for a moment—a *mere* moment!”

“I’ll tell her, of course,” says Grey, who seems a little surprised. “But she’s not in the drawing-room. You were a little late for dinner, you know, and”—here he grows a little aggrieved—“May and Dolly carried her up to May’s room when she came in, and I’ve not seen one of ’em since. However”—with sudden alacrity born of the knowledge that if Amber is let loose from the hidden and mysterious chamber upstairs, May will be more likely to be *en evidence* again for a disconsolate lover—if you say

you want to see Amber in a hurry, I'll let May know."

He moves away, but before he has reached the second doorway in the hall he stops, and, coming back, holds out his hand to Hilary.

"I wish you luck," says he. Adare takes the hand and grasps it; whereon Grey laughs the kind but nervous laugh of the man who abominates sentiment. "I shan't have to wish *hard*!" says he, and, with a last wring of Hilary's hand, he hurries away.

"Fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind."

CHAPTER XXX.

“A rose by any other name?

Nay, that could hardly be.

No other name, my Flower of June,

Could be the name for thee!”

ONE minute—two—five minutes by the clock on the chimneypiece! Hours—hours—*hours* by Hilary’s heart!

Up and down the gaunt old dining-room he goes, *now* as he turns with his eyes on the door, and now as he turns again on the sad-coloured carpet (so dimmed with age and knowledge) that seemed to reflect his thoughts. With each turn his thoughts go up and down.

If she should come! (he is now facing the door), what has he to say to her? How so debase himself before her as to gain a pardon very poorly deserved? If she should *not* come! (He has now turned *from* the door.) His stride grows swifter at that melancholy thought. But hope springs eternal in the human breast, and, unconsciously, he keeps to his belief in her—she will—she *will* come; mercy must be within that gentle heart! If she should *not*! Well! he has earned his discomfiture and must take it. He has turned again here, but even the sight of

the door fails him. No, she is not coming. It is all over!

But he is wrong! Even as hope has quite forsaken him, the door opens softly—very softly and hesitatingly, and now it is closed again, and now—she is coming towards him.

Perhaps there had been reproach, even anger in her eyes—in her heart—as she opened the door so sorely against her will—coming thus at a message from *him*, who should have waited for a message from *her*. But one glance at his face—so drawn, so cruelly changed—kills all resentment in her gentle breast.

Such a face!—before its misery, its utter and terrible self-reproach, and abandonment, all her wrath gives way; all thought of self is sacrificed.

One step brings her to his side. She makes a little first gesture as if she would have liked to lay her hands upon his shoulders, but with a fine restraint stands still.

“Don’t look like that. *Don’t*,” she whispers, as if hurt to the very soul by his undoubted suffering.

“Amber!” he cries, sharply. “You have come! Does it mean—that you—forgive?”

“Is there so much to forgive?” Her face is very pale. “I owe you my life! If you had not pushed me down then——”

“And I owe you mine! If you had not come just then and flung up his arm—— No”—Adare steps a little backward—an eloquent gesture that seems to abandon all right to her—“it is *I* who am the debtor all through.”

"Let us cry quits at least," says she.

"Impossible!"

"At all events let me speak!" She commands him with her eyes. "We are friends?"

"*Friends?*"

"Why not friends? You *will* hear me? I want to tell you about—last night."

"Not that," he interrupts her violently. "I will have no explanations from you. Why should *you* explain? Let *mē* do that—at your feet!"

"I"—softly, yet with gentle strength—"would *wish* you to hear me. When last night you saw me with Mr. Everard—in the lower gallery—he was saying good-bye to me. Good-bye for ever! He"—her voice sinking—"had just asked me to marry him, and I—had just refused." For an instant she lifts her eyes to his, the message they send him is, "because I loved *you!*" Then the soft eyes go down again. "He thought it would be an unlikely thing that we should ever meet again! And—he seemed unhappy. And—when he raised my hand and kissed it in farewell, I felt glad. It was the very least I could do for him. If he had said, "May I kiss your cheek?"—she throws back her beautiful head quite proudly now—"I should have said yes *too*, and not have ever been a bit ashamed of it! But he only kissed my hand."

There is a pause.

"You were angry about that, Hilary, but"—she looks at him steadfastly—"I thought then, and think now, that in allowing him such a farewell, I did you no wrong."

"It is I who have wronged you," says he. A silence falls between them.

"Ah, no," cries she, suddenly. "I will not have you say that. It hurts me."

"It must be said, however! But I was mad—mad with jealousy! I have but one excuse—a poor one, Amber—that every vile thing I said to you arose from my love—my despicable, but"—earnestly—"undying love for you!"

For a while they both stand quietly, gazing into the fire. Then, remembering the rings so hardly wrested from Sir Lucien, he takes them from his pocket.

"Here are your rings," says he. It is perhaps a little too sudden.

She looks at the shining things lying in his palm, their splendid rays reflected by the firelight, and then shrinks backwards. Every vestige of colour has flown from her face.

"Sir Lucien!"

"He has sent them to you. He wishes you to have them." This is straining the truth a little, but he is determined to spare her any further pain.

"Wishes *me* to have them?"

"Yes."

"It is"—coldly—"difficult to believe. Will you put them on the table?" It is as though she cannot bear to touch them. He obeys her with a sinking heart. How is one to understand this strange sweet girl, who can be gentleness itself at one moment, and adamant the next? Despair gives him courage.

Deliberately he takes out that other ring—that once

before he had offered, that once before she had refused. Will she do so again? If so—it will be the end.

“Am I to lay this upon the table too?” asked he, steadily.

Their eyes meet. He can see in hers the struggle that is going on between her pride and her—he does not even dare to name the other word. Will the battle go against him? Does her silence mean that she—— Her gentle nature no doubt, finds it hard to deal the fatal blow.

Half unconsciously the hand holding the ring moves towards the table. The worst appears certain now! But almost as he is about to lay it down, two soft little brown hands catch his. One of them opens his fingers, the other extracts the ring.

“I want it,” says she, simply. Her voice is tremulous—her eyes are drenched.

“You will take it?” His own voice is low and husky. “Amber, take me, too!”

“Ah! I’d *like* to say ‘No,’” cries she, with a touch of irrepressible bitterness. “But,” shaking her charming head as if in sad contempt of herself, “*I can’t.*”

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